

2023

## **An Exploration of the Lived Experiences of Special Education Teachers Engaged in Mentoring Programs for Novice Teachers**

Donna M. Sowerby  
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# Walden University

College of Education and Human Sciences

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2023

Abstract

The Lived Experiences of Special Education Teachers Engaged in Mentoring Programs  
for Novice Teachers

by

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MA, Brooklyn College 1982

BS, Medgar Evers College, 1977

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
Education

Walden University

May 2023

## Abstract

Beginning special education teachers often leave the field within the first 3–5 years of employment. There is ample research available on mentoring programs for beginning teachers. However, limited research exists on mentoring programs for beginning special education teachers. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the lived experiences of novice special education teachers in urban schools to broaden the current understanding regarding their perceptions of mentoring. Using a phenomenological approach, in-depth face-to-face interviews were used with a purposeful sample of 10 novice special education teachers to collect data about mentoring programs.

Self-determination theory was the conceptual framework for examining the mentoring relationships and the participants' perceptions. The key research questions pertained to novice special education teachers' perceptions regarding participation in mentoring programs for novice teachers. The findings from this study are that novice special education teachers' exposure to mentoring varies and there is a need for mentoring programs that are specifically targeted to novice special education teachers. The results of this study revealed that the novice special education teacher participants felt confident in teaching students with disabilities. Participants also felt that mentoring was an important form of support and revealed that they intended to remain in the teaching profession, teaching students with disabilities. A better understanding of the needs of novice special education teachers will foster an improvement of mentoring programs supporting increased teacher retention affecting positive social change.

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## Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my dad, Calvin L. Reid. His faith in me was relentless. He encouraged me throughout my PhD journey. Unfortunately, he passed away before I completed my program. I know that he is looking down on me from heaven, cheering me on.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Teacher retention is an ongoing problem in American society. Schools throughout the United States face the dilemma of acquiring highly effective teachers to meet the needs of diverse learners who are taught in the classroom (Hagaman & Casey, 2018; Haines et al., 2017; Warsame & Valles, 2018). However, novice teachers (i.e., with less than five years of teaching experience) often leave the profession within the first five years of employment. Many variables contribute to low novice special education teacher retention.

Novice special education teachers face several challenges. Special education teachers adhere to the same standards and knowledge of school curriculums as their colleagues in general education and must deliver high quality instruction to a diverse population of learners with disabilities (Rock et al., 2016). Additionally, physical isolation, instructional resources, excessive paperwork, limited knowledge of developing individualized education plans (IEPs), and limited knowledge and skills in behavior management, referral, placement, and evaluation decisions also contribute to low retention among novice special education teachers (Bettini et al., 2018; Gee & Gonsier-Gerdin, 2018; Williams & Dikes, 2015). Other variables that cause novice special education teachers to leave the profession within the first 5 years include lack of appropriate support and difficulty coping with other professional challenges that confront them daily (Mason-Williams, 2015). A plethora of research exists on mentoring programs for novice general education teachers (Gee & Gonsier-Gerdin, 2018; Hagaman & Casey, 2017). However, research on the lived experiences of novice special education teachers in

mentoring programs in urban public schools is limited (Mason-Williams, 2015). There is a need to research strategies that improve novice special education retention.

School administrators are responsible for implementing policies and practices to increase novice special education teacher retention. Mentoring describes a relationship that is formed between a mentor (usually an experienced teacher) and the mentee (the novice or less experienced teacher) who is new to the teaching profession (Hudson, 2016). Mentors are assigned to help the mentee develop the skills and expertise needed to facilitate their success within the teaching profession. Researchers indicated that participation in mentoring programs is essential for novice special education teachers to build capacity in providing services and address the unique needs of students with disabilities (Hudson, 2016; Vittek, 2015).

Retaining novice special education teachers is challenging for school administrators in the United States (Haines et al., 2017). Hagaman and Casey (2018) stated that many schools face continual vacancies due to teacher turnover and a shortage of qualified special education teachers. Induction and mentoring programs vary across districts and schools, but the goal is to increase teacher effectiveness and retention rates (Vittek, 2015). Researchers have indicated that induction and mentoring programs are some of the supports that can increase novice special education teacher retention.

### **Problem Statement**

Novice special education teacher retention continues to be an ongoing problem in the United States. Special education teachers leave the teaching profession at higher rates than their general education peers (Haines et al., 2017). Novice special education teachers

did not feel connected or motivated to stay employed beyond five years (Mason-Williams, 2015). Researchers cited a need for more support as the main reason for low retention rates of novice special education teachers (Hagaman & Casey, 2018; Vittek, 2015). Self-determination theory indicates that motivation and relatedness are key factors in employee retention, which applies to novice special education teachers (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

Many novice special education teachers entered the educational system without the competencies required to function within the day-to-day parameters of the school environment (Lejonberg & Tiplic, 2016). There needs to be more information available in the literature on mentoring programs for novice special education teachers (Sowell, 2017). The findings of this study will help fill the gap in the information of novice special education teachers engaged in mentoring programs.

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 required the delivery of instruction to students with disabilities by highly qualified special education teachers (Mason-Williams, 2015). However, beginning teachers with fewer than five years of teaching experience were more prevalent in today's schools than highly experienced educators. According to the New Teacher Center Review of State Policies on Teacher Induction (Goldrick et al., 2012), the number of years of teaching experience for the average teacher was 15 years in 1987-1988; whereas in 2007-2008, the average teacher only had one year of teaching experience. These assessments indicated the need for a closer look at the retention problem of novice special education teachers, their need for

effective mentoring, and an examination of the lived experiences of those teachers at the center of this issue.

In this chapter, I discuss the purpose of the study, research questions, conceptual framework, nature of the study, definition of terms, assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, significance of the study, and conclude with a summary of the chapter.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of novice special education teachers in urban schools in the northeastern region of the United States regarding their experience with mentoring programs towards improved retention, including motivation and relatedness as potential contributors towards their intention to remain employed beyond 5 years, as defined by the self-determination theory. *Mentoring* is the relationship between the mentor (i.e., a more experienced professional) and the mentee as one who is learning about the profession (Hudson, 2016).

Participant recruitment involved purposeful sampling through an invitation flyer via social media portals and email. Participants were individually interviewed using semi structured interviews that were audio recorded. The data were transcribed and analyzed (read and re-read) to determine codes and expose emerging themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The data analysis culminated in a written discussion of the essence of mentoring for novice special education teachers.

The findings of this study add to the body of knowledge representative of progress toward closing the gap in the literature related to special education teacher

retention. I used the results of this study to contribute needed recommendations for developing mentoring programs for novice special education teachers.

### **Research Questions**

The research questions for this study were as follows:

1. What are novice special education teachers' lived experiences of their participation in a mentoring program?
2. What is the role of mentoring towards retention according to the lived experiences of novice special education teachers who participated in a mentoring program?
3. What is the role of mentoring towards retention using *motivation*, as a self-determination theory factor, according to the lived experiences of novice special education teachers?
4. What is the role of mentoring towards retention using *relatedness*, as a self-determination theory factor, according to the lived experiences of novice special education teachers?
5. What is the role of mentoring towards retention using *competence*, as a self-determination theory factor, according to the lived experiences of novice special education teachers?

### **Conceptual Framework**

#### **Self-Determination Theory**

In this study, self-determination theory, a form of motivational theory, was used to examine social conditions that facilitate or undermine the outcome of mentoring

programs for novice special education teachers (see Ryan & Deci, 2017). Self-determination theory highlights the forces that move people to take various actions concerning what motivates them to display certain behaviors. According to Ryan and Deci (2017), self-determination explores educational settings to determine adequacy in support of teacher success. Self-determination theory suggests that individuals require autonomy, competence, and relatedness to maintain emotional and healthy well-being and psychological health (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

This study uses motivation, relatedness, and competence to explore educational settings to determine how mentoring impacts teacher retention. In self-determination theory, competence involves the teacher feeling that they possess the necessary skills to meet their students' needs (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Competence is the factor that enables teachers to feel proficient in their teaching ability to deal with any issues that may arise within their environment (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Relatedness is another essential factor of self-determination theory. Relatedness focuses on the social connections that the teacher has within the educational environment and on how socially connected a teacher feels with their peers and teachers' perceptions of how they are respected by their peers (Ryan & Deci, 2017). The school environment is crucial in maintaining and developing teachers' motivation in skills proficiency.

Self-determination theory informs how novice special education teachers were motivated to remain in teaching. This theory also informs knowledge and skills gained from novice special education teachers engaging in mentoring programs. In addition,

self-determination theory provided a motivational lens for a conceptual link in the literature related to the research questions in Chapter 2.

### **Nature of the Study**

A qualitative phenomenological approach was the most appropriate design for this study. Using qualitative inquiry enabled me to understand the phenomenon studied.

*Qualitative inquiry* involves a combination of assumptions and interpretive and conceptual frameworks that inform a study of research problems that emphasize the meanings individuals give to particular problems (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A phenomenological approach enables researchers to describe several individuals' lived experiences and obtain the phenomenon's overall meaning (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). The phenomenological approach involved descriptions of lived experiences and their meaning instead of explanations, allowing individuals time to reflect on their own experiences and derive meaning. I used the phenomenological approach to understand how novice special education teachers give meaning and understanding to their experiences in mentoring programs (see Moustakas, 1994). This study was necessary to fill the gap in research on meeting the needs of novice special education teachers.

A variety of qualitative approaches were reviewed before I selected the phenomenological approach. Ethnographic research involves the study of a cultural group over an extensive period. Grounded theory is the constant study of an action, process, or interaction of diverse groups. Case study requires the exploration of an event, program, or process with one or several participants using a variety of data over time. The narrative

approach involves the study of the stories of individuals about their lives or events (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Of the qualitative approaches reviewed, only phenomenology provided a more profound and realistic understanding of the lived experiences with the phenomena investigated for the proposed study.

The participant sample was drawn from the dispersal of invitation flyers via social media and email. Each potential participant was informed that participation in the study was completely voluntary. The participant selection consisted of a purposeful sample of 10 novice special education teachers with 1 to 5 years of teaching experience, including mentoring program participation in schools within the northeastern United States.

Participants were willing to participate voluntarily in an audio-recorded interview that lasted approximately 45 minutes. Audio-recorded interviews allowed participants to provide thick, rich descriptions of their experiences with mentoring programs. Following participant recruitment, the potential participants received an Informed Consent Form that attested to their voluntary participation, ability to participate in an interview, follow-up meeting to clarify the interview data, and permission to have their interview audio recorded. They also agreed that the findings could be published in aggregate form in a doctoral dissertation and perhaps a journal article. I informed each participant that no harm or risk would befall them from participation in this study. Pseudonyms were used to ensure confidentiality and protect participants' identities. As the researcher, I functioned as the instrument in the data collection process using a semi structured interview protocol with open-ended questions. The data were collected through individually recorded interviews with novice special education teachers who have participated in mentoring

programs. I transcribed the recorded interviews verbatim and manually analyzed (read and re-read) the transcripts to reveal emerging patterns and themes. The emerging themes and patterns were categorized using NVivo (Windows), which assisted in coding and organizing the collected data. The identified concepts and themes were used to identify patterns in the data presented across multiple interviewees to understand how participants experienced the phenomena studied through horizontalization (see Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). Significant themes were used to develop a written description of the participants' experiences (see Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). This description developed a discussion (commonalities and discrepancies, if any) of the participants' experiences with mentoring. Discrepant information contradicting the identified themes was presented with the findings to ensure reliability (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I indicated discrepant cases by documenting differences in the interviews.

### **Definition of Terms**

Some terms used in this study and employed in finding articles, peer-reviewed journals, research documents, and title searches, are defined as follows:

*Competence*: A individual's need to feel that they are proficient in skills that are necessary to deal with any challenges that may arise in a given environment (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

*Mentee*: A less experienced (teacher) professional who is mentored by an experienced professional (Gimbel & Kefor, 2018; Hudson, 2016).

*Mentor*: A more experienced (teacher) professional (Gimbel & Kefor, 2018; Hudson, 2016).

*Mentoring*: The relationship between the mentor (a more experienced teacher professional) and the mentee as one who is learning about the profession ( Gimbel & Kefor, 2018; Hudson, 2016).

*Novice*: An individual who has less experience in a particular field—here, fewer than 5 years of teaching (Bettini et al., 2017; Hagaman & Casey, 2017).

*Relatedness*: An individual's need to feel socially connected, valued, and respected in a given environment (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

*Self-determination theory*: A theory concerned with how social issues impact individual's success by fulfilment of their basic needs (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

*Teacher induction program*: A program that support novices (teachers) as they gain instructional and management skills, learn curricula, and adapt to school-level norms and processes (Jones et al., 2013).

### **Assumptions**

In this study, I assumed that the participants were special education teachers with one to five years of experience. I also assumed that the participants would reply honestly and authentically to each question. Additionally, I assumed that the participants would reply with information revealing their experiences with the phenomenon studied. Finally, it was assumed that participants would be forthright in their ability to participate in this study.

### **Scope and Delimitation**

This study aimed to broaden the current understanding of how novice special education teachers perceived their exposure to mentoring. A purposeful sample of novice

special education teachers was taken from school districts in the northeastern region of the United States. Qualitative data were collected to obtain participants' perceptions, knowledge, and behaviors associated with their mentoring experience using audio recordings with face-to-face interviews featuring open-ended questions. However, the transferability of data applied only to those with similar characteristics.

### **Limitations**

The study was limited to a purposive sample of novice special education teachers with one to five years of experience teaching students with disabilities. All participants had experience with mentoring and were willing to participate in an in-depth interview and a follow-up meeting. Additionally, using a phenomenological approach, the research focused on achieving a deeper understanding of the issues, not on finding causal relationships (Moustakas, 1994). The participants' essential characteristics consisted of their experience with mentoring and willingness to participate in the interview process. The shared characteristics of the purposive sample do not make it representative of a larger population, which might present as a potential weakness.

Another limitation was subjectivity since the results relied on my interpretation of the data. As the researcher, I brought my values and biases to the study. Creswell and Poth (2018) recommend recording the interviews and using a computer program to aid in coding and analyzing data to address reliability, which was adopted for this study. I also collaborated with the participants and conducted member checking to increase reliability in interpreting and reporting the data. An interview protocol was used to maintain

consistency. An additional limitation was that it could be challenging to replicate the findings with a qualitative study. I kept detailed notes to enable replication of the study.

### **Significance**

This study is significant because novice special education teachers presented their experiences in mentoring programs to provide evidence of the needs and concerns to address the profession's demands. However, mentoring policies and practices for novice special education teachers are an under researched area (Sowell, 2017). The results of this study add to the literature and provide insights into the specific needs of special education teachers. The findings contribute to positive social change, teacher retention, and inform the future development of mentoring programs specifically designed for novice special education teachers (Mason-Williams, 2015). Positive social change resulting from the findings could enlighten education administrators to understand the needs of novice special education teachers and develop mentoring programs to meet their specific needs and encourage increased teacher retention.

### **Summary**

Novice special education teacher retention is an ongoing problem in American society. School districts throughout the United States face the dilemma of retaining novice special education teachers (Williams & Dikes, 2015). These teachers leave the profession within the first five years of employment because they do not have the necessary support or preparation to meet the needs of their students with disabilities and many other professional challenges that confront them daily (Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018; Mason-Williams, 2015).

The development and implementation of mentoring programs are essential for novice special education teachers. These teachers require continuous support to develop confidence and professional proficiency in teaching students with disabilities (Roegman et al., 2017). The mentoring relationship can help novice special education teachers improve and develop the necessary skills and confidence to positively impact student achievement (Mitchell et al., 2017; Vittek, 2015). Various mentoring programs have been developed and implemented to provide services to novice teachers in general education. However, research was lacking regarding specific areas of concern for novice special education teachers. Therefore, this study was necessary and timely to shed light on this issue and provide information for necessary changes and improvements in support of special education teachers. This qualitative phenomenological study aimed to understand the perceived aspects of mentoring from the perspective of novice special education teachers to foster teacher retention and provide recommendations for practical application and future research on this topic.

In Chapter 2, I review professional and peer-reviewed literature on teacher retention, mentoring programs, induction programs, self-determination theory, professional challenges, professional knowledge, professional teaching skills, and coping with stress for novice special education teachers related to the research problem and the research questions guiding the study.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

Teacher shortages affect school budgets, class instruction, student achievement, and staff distribution (Newberry & Allsop, 2017). Teacher retention, mainly special education teacher retention, has been an ongoing problem throughout the United States (Hagaman & Casey, 2018). Many novice special education teachers were entering the educational system without the competencies required realistically to function within the day-to-day parameters of the school environment (Lejonberg & Tiplic, 2016). School districts must implement policies and practices to retain novice teachers (Sparks et al., 2017). A large body of literature exists about the importance of mentoring programs and improved teacher retention; however, more information is needed on mentoring programs for novice special education teachers (Cornelius et al., 2020; Mason-Williams, 2015). Mentoring services varied across school districts. In some instances, special education teachers received mentoring services from their general education peers, while others received mentoring services from their special education peers.

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of novice special education teachers in urban schools in the northeastern region of the United States about their experience with mentoring programs towards increased retention, including motivation and relatedness as potential contributors towards their intention to remain employed beyond 5 years, as defined by the self-determination theory. In the research, mentoring was viewed as a collaboration where an experienced teacher (mentor) assisted inexperienced or novice teachers in various aspects related to the profession's culture.

Participants were recruited using purposeful sampling by dispersing of invitation flyers via social media and email to special education teachers participating in mentoring programs for novice teachers. I interviewed participants individually using semi structured interviews that were audio recorded. The data was manually transcribed and analyzed to determine codes and themes from transcripts that were manually analyzed (read and re-read) to expose emerging patterns and themes (Moustakas, 1994). The data analysis culminated in a written discussion of the essence of mentoring for special education teachers.

In Chapter 2, I review the literature on mentoring and induction programs for novice teachers, with a primary focus on special education teachers. I explain the literature search strategies used to find studies that focused on mentoring. I also present a more detailed explanation of the conceptual underpinnings of this study. Finally, I provide a summary of the literature and transition into Chapter 3.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

I examined literature from several sources, including EBSCO, ERIC, ProQuest, Education Research Complete, Dissertation Abstracts, Psychological Abstracts, SAGE online database, and Google Scholar, to investigate peer-reviewed journal articles and other scholarly literature on mentoring and to gain an understanding of novice special education teaching conditions. Key search terms and combinations were *self-determination theory, motivational theory, history, trends, development, special education teacher, teacher attrition, teacher retention, mentoring, induction, special education, teacher attrition, special education teacher retention, mentoring for special*

*education teachers/educators, induction programs for special education teachers/educators, and teacher preparation for special education teachers.* Past literature focused on mentoring programs for improvement in teacher attrition and retention; recent literature that concerns the importance of mentoring programs for novice special education teachers was limited. In the literature review, I broadened my focus to include studies and articles on mentoring for novice and special education teachers published between 2015 and 2021. Primary sources and articles published before 2015 were cited for their conceptual principles and historical value concerning mentoring.

### **Conceptual Framework**

#### **Self-Determination Theory**

The conceptual framework for this study was self-determination theory from Ryan and Deci (2017). *Self-determination theory* is a motivational theory that can expedite the examination of social conditions that facilitate or undermine the outcome of mentoring programs for novice special education teachers (Ryan & Deci, 2017). The self-determination theory can highlight the forces that move people to take various actions concerning what motivates them to display certain behaviors. Educational settings have been explored to determine adequacy in support of teacher success employing self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Self-determination theory suggests that individuals require autonomy, competence, and relatedness to maintain emotional and healthy well-being and psychological health (Ryan & Deci, 2017). These three factors provided a motivational lens to explore novice special education teachers' experiences in mentoring programs.

Novice special education teachers must have the confidence to make decisions relating to instruction, management, and classroom structure with the addition of the implementation of services for students with disabilities. Novice special education teachers needed to feel confident that the school authority and their colleagues valued their professional decisions in teaching their students. Competence refers to individuals feeling they possess the necessary skills to proficiently meet any challenges within their environment (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Novice special education teachers must build the capacity teaching skills needed to teach students with varied disabilities so that they are prepared for any issues that may arise within their classrooms. They need to feel and exhibit proficiency in teaching students with disabilities. Lastly, relatedness refers to the social connections and the feelings of belonging those individuals have within their environment. Novice special education teachers need to feel collegiality and respect from others within the school environment.

Self-determination theory within the field of education has helped to explore teacher motivation. Daniels (2017) applied self-determination theory to identify curricula influencing teachers' professional motivation. This qualitative study consisted of interviews using a purposeful sample of middle school teachers. The findings revealed that teachers felt more productive and effective when they experienced positive logistical factors regarding input with the master schedule, organization of time, and the condition of their physical environment (Daniels, 2017). The findings suggested that feelings of autonomy encouraged teachers to feel competent and related within their schools. Overall, environments that met the psychological needs (autonomy, competence, and

relatedness) encouraged individuals to engage, put forth effort, and participate in activities (Daniels, 2017). This study provided an understanding of factors that foster increased teacher motivation and impact teacher retention.

Self-determination theory has been applied to adult education settings. Van Twembeke and Goeman (2018) applied self-determination theory to explore how adult education instructors experienced changes in the delivery of instruction. The change in instruction included flipping their classrooms which incorporated instructional technology. This qualitative phenomenological study consisted of semi structured interviews of adult education instructors to determine the impact of change management principles on autonomy, competence, and relatedness. The researchers suggested that the administrators involve the instructors in the decision-making aspect of adopting new class innovations to promote autonomy. Administrators were also encouraged to consider the development of a support team to facilitate peer interaction as a venue for instructors to share their experiences adopting the innovation (Van Twembeke & Goeman, 2018). The researchers also suggested that administrators provide adult education instructors with training in innovation to foster emotional support and confidence. Van Twembeke and Goeman's findings helped administrators develop activities that fostered change management principles to support the acceptance of instructional innovations that impacted adult education instructors' autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

### **Literature Review Related to Key Concepts**

As mentioned in Chapter 1, retention poses a problem for state and local educational administrations throughout the United States (Morettini, 2016; Vittek, 2015).

More than 30 years ago, a report titled *A Nation at Risk* (U.S. Department of Education, 1983) highlighted the shortage of special education teachers. This shortage continues to be an issue of concern today as school administrators face challenges of acquiring high-quality teachers to meet the needs of diverse learners. Teacher preparation programs did not prepare teachers with the skills and knowledge needed to effectively meet the needs of diverse learners (Sowell, 2017). Implemented policies and practices for novice special education teachers, impacted teacher retention.

### **Teacher Retention**

Teacher retention is a problem throughout the United States. In addition, special education teacher retention has been a severe problem in education for over three decades (Sayman et al., 2018). Research showed that novice special education teachers often leave the profession within the first 3 to 5 years at a rate double that of general education teachers (Mason-Williams, 2015). Low teacher retention has impacted school staffing, budgets, and instruction of students (Hagaman & Casey, 2018; Newberry & Allsop, 2017; Vittek, 2015). This impact can be costly with recruitment costs, new hire processing, and training provided by schools and school districts (Vagi et al., 2019). Low retention rates impacted students and staff. There is a shortage of qualified special education teachers to work with the varied population of students with disabilities (Mason-Williams & Gagnon, 2016). Retention also presented a gap in student learning due to a continuous change in teachers (Mason-Williams & Gagnon, 2016). The price tag associated with low teacher retention can range from \$4,000.00 to more than \$18,000.00, depending on the district, and more than approximately \$8 billion nationally (Sutcher et

al., 2016). Low teacher retention causes inconsistencies within the learning environment that force administrations to seek substitute teachers and sometimes uncertified teachers to fill teacher vacancies.

Teachers have left the profession for various reasons (Sutcher et al., 2016). Some reasons for early departure from the teaching profession were stressful working conditions, large caseloads, the lack of administrative support, and isolation (Hagaman & Casey, 2018; Newberry & Allsop, 2017; Samuels, 2018; Williams & Dikes, 2015). Newberry and Allsop (2017) reported that special education teachers also indicated emotional and philosophical isolation and a lack of professional relationships with general education peers as a reason for their departure from the teaching profession. Teacher preparation also impacted retention, and teachers with less preparation before entering the teaching profession were likelier to have a lower retention rate (Darling-Hammond et al., 2016). Teachers from various backgrounds entered the field of education with a wealth of knowledge and skills from varied teacher preparation programs (Sayman & Chui, 2018; Yell & Bateman, 2018). It is essential that colleges provide programs that produce well prepared graduates in the field of special education.

Teacher retention continues to be a problem in the United States, especially with special education teachers leaving the profession at a higher rate than their general education peers. The literature highlighted stress from large caseloads, lack of support from the administration, and feelings of isolation within the school environment as reasons for low special education teacher retention (Darling-Hammond et al., 2016; Hagaman & Casey, 2018; Newberry & Allsop, 2017; Roegman et al., 2017; Samuels,

2018; Williams & Dikes, 2015). District and school administrators needed to understand the needs of novice special education teachers to provide appropriate support programs to foster increased teacher retention. This study adds to the literature on novice special education teachers who participate in mentoring programs that can foster increased retention.

### **Novice Special Education Teacher Challenges**

Novice special education teachers enter the teaching profession with various preconceived ideas of the profession. Many of these teachers were unaware of the physical and mental demands of being a special education teacher. They also felt ill-prepared to provide appropriate services to students with disabilities (Hagaman & Casey, 2018). The role and duties of special education teachers varied depending on the type of class and nature of disability identified for each student.

Special education instruction also varies. Some special education teachers taught in classes that served students with multi-disabilities, which required support staff (e.g., paraprofessionals, nurses, or therapists). Other special education teachers taught in resource or push-in models in inclusive settings (i.e., general and special education students) where they taught with a general education teacher full-time or part-time (Woolf, 2018). Professional duties vary by class designation. Novice special education teachers have been challenged with varied instructional and behavioral constraints.

The duties of novice special education teachers have caused professional stress. Hayden et al. (2018) conducted a qualitative case study to examine sources of teacher stress. The researchers used a convenience sample of 16 special education teachers from

elementary, middle, and high school who worked in a Midwestern metropolitan setting. The data collection consisted of interviews collected over three years. The study's findings revealed that special education teachers felt that the lack of administrative support, individual student challenges, teacher perceptions, and state mandates coupled with large caseloads presented the most challenges. Novice special education teachers were also responsible for consulting with service providers to ensure students received the services detailed in their IEPs. This study had limitations in the selection of participants, as each participant was a member of the university special education practicum program. The sample was broad across school settings. The recommendations included administrators increasing their knowledge of special education legislation and requirements to foster support and attend to the challenges faced by novice special education teachers.

Another study focused on workload manageability among novice special and general education teachers. Bettini et al. (2017) conducted a pilot study using structural equation modeling to determine novice special education teachers' perceptions of their workloads. The data collection consisted of surveys completed by 61 novice special education teachers and 184 novice general education teachers who taught first through eighth grade. The participants completed surveys in the fall and spring. The surveys distributed in the fall focused on workload manageability, while the surveys distributed in the spring focused on career intentions and emotional exhaustion. The results of the study revealed that both novice special education and general education teachers perceived that workload manageability promoted emotional exhaustion. To that end, there was a

relationship between teachers' workload manageability and their intentions to remain in the teaching profession (Bettini et al., 2017). There were a few limitations in this study:

1. The researchers used different measurement models for special and general education teachers.
2. The sample size of each group varied for the multi-group model used.
3. The results could only be generalized to participants with the same characteristics as Midwestern teachers who received their certification through participation in a traditional preparation program.

The teaching profession presents many challenges for novice teachers, especially special education teachers. The literature revealed that large caseloads, student management issues, lack of knowledge of state mandates for the education of students with disabilities, lack of administrative support, and undisclosed information about job duties were some of the variables that fostered low teacher retention and exhaustion among novice teachers (Bettini et al., 2017; Hayden et al., 2018). The implementation of mentoring and induction programs can help alleviate the stress caused by some of these challenges through ongoing professional development and the designation of mentors to work closely with novice special education teachers.

### **Historical Background of Mentoring**

The Greeks used mentors to train apprentices in various capacities to promote human development. The word *mentoring* evolved in America sometime during the 18th century and was presented to the public in 1778 by Ann Murry, who wrote one of the first books on mentoring, titled *Mentoria: The Young Ladies' Instructor* (Irby & Boswell,

2016). Several books on the topic of mentoring followed throughout the 18th century. In the early 1980s, a surge in mentoring programs occurred throughout the educational profession in response to the educational reform of teaching (Irby & Boswell, 2016).

Mentoring became the mantra for supplemental support in teacher development.

Mentoring has proven to be crucial in teacher preparation and has brought attention to providing support to novice teachers during their first years of teaching (Hudson, 2016; Mason-Williams, 2015; Morettini, 2016; Newberry & Allsop, 2017; Vittek, 2015).

### **Definitions of Induction and Mentoring**

The terms *teacher induction* and *mentoring programs* are novice teacher support initiatives. Induction programs consist of instructional and personal support for novice teachers; they also incorporate mentoring, collegial collaboration, and professional development activities that support the development of effective teaching strategies (Polikoff et al., 2017). Mentoring programs were a component of induction programs that consisted of a collaboration between an experienced teacher and a beginning or novice teacher where the experienced teacher provided support and guidance relating to the field of teaching (Hudson, 2016; Vittek, 2015). Positive mentor–mentee relationships could help novice teachers transition into the teaching profession within their schools.

### **Mentoring Programs**

This study focused on mentoring programs that provided mentoring to novice special education teachers. Many states across the United States incorporated mentoring programs to improve teacher retention. Educational policymakers realized the importance of beginning or novice teacher support and guidance during the first years of teaching.

Mentoring programs serve as a bridge between preservice knowledge and practicum experience for novice special education teachers to develop the necessary skills to work with diverse learners in their classrooms (Roegman et al., 2017). Mentors provided opportunities for mentees to observe various facets of instructional delivery in teaching students with disabilities within the confines of the classroom through modeling and class visitations. Mentors of special education teachers modeled appropriate instructional and behavior strategies while the mentee observed the actual instructional process (Hudson, 2016; Sowell, 2017). The mentors exposed mentees to new instructional techniques and strategies by modeling activities.

Mentoring programs have become the primary method of supporting and retaining novice teachers (Hong & Matsko, 2019). Mentoring within the educational profession involves an experienced teacher working with a novice teacher. School administrators often designate an experienced teacher, coach, or faculty member to help a new teacher transition to teaching and understand the necessary protocols to follow within the school environment (Hong & Matsko, 2019; Hudson, 2016; Mitchell et al., 2017). Mentoring is a component of induction programs that are implemented to support novice teachers within the schools setting.

Mentoring models and practices varied throughout school districts. The overall premise of mentoring was to increase retention, improve teaching, and provide enriched professional development (Lejonberg & Tiplic, 2016; Sparks et al., 2017). Mentoring programs that contained activities focused on school climate and school culture fostered a sense of relatedness and encouraged mentees to remain in the profession (Hudson, 2016;

Lejonberg & Tiplic, 2016; Sowell, 2017). The literature indicated that positive mentor-mentee relationships contributed to mentees' desire to remain in the teaching profession, enhanced teaching skills, and a lack of isolation (Lejonberg & Tiplic, 2016; Sparks et al., 2017). The allocation of common planning time promoted structured opportunities for engagement between the mentor and mentee to collaborate on lesson plans, observations, and other activities.

Mentoring programs that focused on positive mentor-mentee relationships could encourage teacher retention. Sparks et al., (2017) conducted a qualitative study to explore a state teacher mentoring program to discover how mentoring positively impacted teacher retention. Participants were generated from a purposeful sample of six elementary school mentors. The researchers collected data using interviews, mentor/mentee observations, and a review of school district mentoring policy documents. Positive mentor relationships, support, and avoidance of classroom isolation assisted in novice teachers' retention (Sparks et al., 2017). The findings of the study revealed that the mentoring program provided an environment that fostered collegial support and positive mentor relationships that supported teacher retention.

Mentor–mentee relationship was a key component of professional and emotional support for novice teachers. Gordon (2017) conducted a qualitative case study using relational cultural theory to explore the relationship between a novice physical education teacher and his mentor. The purposeful sample comprised the novice physical education teacher and his mentor. Data collection involved direct observations in the school gymnasium, one-on-one interviews, and combined interviews involving both participants.

The following themes emerged from the study: working relationships, personal relationships, suggestions, feedback on teaching techniques, and growth. The study findings revealed that the novice physical education teacher perceived his relationship with his mentor as a cohesive working relationship in which he felt comfortable enough to accept and provide quality feedback to his mentor. Both participants perceived their relationship as cohesive, and they believed that their professional growth increased because of the mentoring experience.

Mentoring programs were incorporated into induction programs to foster support for novice teachers. Seagraves and Reid (2019) conducted a qualitative comparative case study focused on the job satisfaction of new faculty (teachers) who participated in induction programs. Purposeful sampling was used to draw participants that produced six administrators and 17 new faculty (teachers) over four schools. The researchers analyzed each school's induction program through interviews with school administrators before interviewing the teachers. The cross-case analysis revealed that each of the four schools provided orientation and some form of mentoring for the new teachers. However, mentoring program implementation was different at each school (Seagraves & Reid, 2019). The study's result revealed that some schools needed to provide their mentors with training, a stipend, or reduced duties to reciprocate for mentoring the new teachers. Overall, the results revealed that the new teachers felt supported within their schools by their mentors and colleagues. The new teachers also expressed that mentoring was helpful in their integration into their schools; however, the culture of the school fostered positive relationships and supported job satisfaction.

The studies mentioned were consistent with the literature regarding mentoring programs for novice teachers. Mentoring is a positive aspect of an induction program that can support novice teachers' transition into the teaching profession (Bower-Phipps et al., 2016; Hagaman & Casey, 2018; Weisling & Gardiner, 2018). The studies also revealed that mentoring supported novice teachers' tendency to remain in teaching coupled with positive school culture.

### ***Mentor Program Development***

Mentoring is an engaging activity where an experienced teacher provides varied support to a novice teacher. However, only some experienced teachers may be suitable to become a mentor since mentoring has specific practices, skills, and knowledge different from teaching students (Bower-Phipps et al., 2016; Weisling & Gardiner, 2018). Weisling and Gardiner (2018) described four strategies for implementing a mentoring program, including mentor selection as the first strategy. Effective mentor selection requires clear expectations and definitions of mentoring duties (Weisling & Gardiner, 2018). Clear expectations fostered smooth mentoring with clear guidelines that aid in building cohesive mentor-mentee relationships. The administrator should discuss the role of the mentor in terms of their responsibility in developing the mentees' teaching skills, modeling strategies, providing feedback, keeping a mentor log, and including the frequency of sessions. *Outside mentoring* took place before or after instruction and provided time for collaboration and problem-solving, analysis of student data, and teacher reflection on strategies (Gardiner, 2017; Weisling & Gardiner, 2018).

*Inside mentoring* refers to mentors supporting mentees during instruction as they hone their teaching and behavior management skills (Gardiner, 2017; Weisling & Gardiner, 2018). Mentors could observe mentees as they taught and help them manage behavior through co-teaching, demonstration teaching, or stepping in during activities. The mentor might assist during a lesson by giving cues to the mentee while teaching a lesson, or the mentor may model teaching practices or strategies as necessary (Gardiner, 2017; Weisling & Gardiner, 2018). During *inside mentoring*, the mentor and mentee engaged in collaborative teaching, planning, and taught a lesson together. The mentor engaged with the mentee and the students and offered support at any time. This collaboration also provided for teachable moments and reflection. The mentor might also provide demonstration teaching while the mentee observed the mentor demonstrating a particular strategy or practice with their students during instruction. A mentor might also provide services to the mentee by giving a nonverbal cue or taking over the lesson spontaneously to provide support. The mentor and the mentee should discuss methods to alleviate anxiety during procedures (Weisling & Gardiner, 2018). *Mentor the mentor* is a strategy that focuses on professional development for mentors. Mentors need to hone their mentoring skills through participation in professional development. Mentors should also build their capacity in co-mentoring and metacognitive mentoring activities using the same strategies they will use with mentees (Weisling & Gardiner, 2018). The mentoring expert would present activities for the mentors to engage in that would enhance their mentoring skills through individual and group sessions.

Metacognition mentoring activities are when mentors participate in role play and practice strategies with their mentees. Lastly, *relationships* focused on building professional solid mentor relationships with mentees and their students (Hong & Matsko, 2019; Woolf, 2018). Building relationships with mentees fostered cohesiveness and overall ease of working in the classroom collectively. The mentor also served as a support liaison between the mentee and the administration (Weisling & Gardiner, 2018). Utilizing these strategies helped to foster a positive mentor-mentee experience. Mentors need to hone their mentoring skills through participation in professional development. Mentors should also build their capacity in co-mentoring and metacognitive mentoring activities using the same strategies they will use with mentees (Weisling & Gardiner, 2018). The mentoring expert would present activities for the mentors to engage in that would enhance their mentoring skills through individual and group sessions.

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Mentors have various functions in this role. Gardiner (2017) conducted a study to explore the practices used by mentors using inside and outside mentoring program experiences. They employed a small sample of six new teachers and two mentors within

an urban school setting. Site-based mentors received training before working with a mentee. Mentors' teaching programs were modified to provide mentoring services to mentees. The inside mentoring service focused on the mentor participating in collaborative teaching, modeling teaching strategies, deliberate scaffolding, and taking over the teaching of a lesson to support the mentee (Gardiner, 2017). The inside and outside mentor services provided a balance of support.

The outside service fostered face-to-face meetings that entailed debriefing sessions, co-lesson planning, analysis of audiotapes, journal writing for reflective practice, and demonstrations of teaching where the mentor modeled teaching practices for the mentee (Gardiner, 2017). Data collection included interviews, observations, and analysis of mentor documents. The data provided insight into the delivery of service to novice teachers. This study contained a small sample of participants, but replication is possible on a larger scale. The information was valuable to the teaching profession.

### ***Special Education Teacher Knowledge***

Federal legislation has changed the way students with disabilities receive an education. Educators in the 21st century face challenges in educating students with disabilities within the general education environment as much as possible. The legislation also encouraged the implementation of research-based instruction and interventions to ensure the success of students with and without disabilities (Van 2016). Students with disabilities were entitled to the necessary aids and support to help them successfully access the general education curriculum (IDEIA, 2016).

IDEIA legislation has included general education teachers in the education and development of IEPs for students with disabilities. General education teachers work with general education students and students with disabilities in inclusion and mainstream programs where students with disabilities work among their non-disabled peers. These teachers should know and understand legislation to facilitate inclusive practices and delivery of services to students with disabilities (Decker & Brady, 2016; O'Connor et al., 2016). Teachers who teach students with disabilities are responsible for ensuring that services are rendered appropriately.

Both general and special education teachers are charged with teaching students with disabilities. General education and special education teachers should understand the legislation that impacts mandated services to students with disabilities (Cornelius & Sandmel, 2020; Decker & Brady, 2016). Building knowledge in educational legislation can prevent legal violations and help educators make informed decisions in delivering services to students with disabilities (Decker & Brady, 2016). General and special education teachers can use their knowledge of special education legislation to enhance their teaching skills and support parents in decision-making situations.

### **Special Education Teachers Skills**

Special education teachers are placed in various teaching situations when they enter the teaching profession. Special education teachers were seen as experts in specialized instruction for students with disabilities within the following positions: resource room teacher, itinerant teacher, consultant teacher, self-contained teacher, and other inclusive arrangements while performing administrative duties, which entail

developing IEPs with other tasks (Woolf, 2018). A qualitative approach was used to identify critical skills that special education teachers should possess. The sample was drawn from a more extensive study of 238 participants that used a survey instrument. For this study, 140 participants (special education classroom teachers, special educators, and special administrators) responded to the opened-ended portion of the survey, which was reflective of this study. Teachers working within the following categories were excluded from participation in this study: mentor teachers, itinerant teachers, non-certified special education teachers, special education teachers in roles other than classroom teaching, and special administrators not responsible for a teacher performance review (Woolf, 2018).

The following skill domains emerged from the findings: understanding all disability categories and other impacts on learning, integrated expertise, and instructional flexibility. Wolf (2018) discussed the domains as follows: *knowledge of disability categories and other impacts on learning* that encompassed what special education teachers needed to know to teach students with disabilities. Special education teachers must understand how to effectively match instructional environments and teaching techniques to students' learning styles to ensure that students receive appropriate instruction. Special education teachers must also possess empathy and patience and understand the need for compassion when teaching students with disabilities. *Integrated expertise* focused on special education teachers' extensive knowledge of the general education curriculum. Special education teachers need to have a broad knowledge of using evidence-based practices to provide the necessary support and accommodations for students with disabilities to access the general education curriculum. Special education

teachers should also understand and utilize effective behavior management and classroom strategies to maintain appropriate student behavior. *Instructional flexibility* deals with the special education teacher's ability to simultaneously utilize individual accommodations during instruction. Special education teachers planned their lessons just as their general education peers. However, special education teacher must adjust/adapt their teaching on the spot and think on their feet during instruction. They must be able to modify and revise strategies to support access to the general education curriculum consistent with the student's individual education program goals.

Competency in the critical skill domains was essential to ensure that students with disabilities received appropriate instruction and services. Special education teachers have a unique position where they must possess extensive knowledge of disabilities and the core curriculum coupled with evidenced-based practices in their teaching. At the same time, they followed the goals of their students' IEPs. These teachers must also keep abreast of legislation that impacts how instruction and services are delivered to their students. The study had the following limitations: data were collected anonymously, which precluded opportunities for verification of responses, and the special education teacher participant group had twice the number of participants than the other two groups of participants, which could have influenced the results. Moreover, the participant sample did not include itinerants, mentor teachers, and special education teachers outside of the self-contained classroom.

### **Novice Special Education Teacher Stress**

Research cited stress as a reason for low special education teacher retention. Cancio et al. (2018) conducted a quantitative study to identify positive coping skills used by special education teachers to combat job stress. Data were collected from a convenience sample of 211 certified special education teachers. The survey was made available to the participants via Survey Monkey. Exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis were used as a data reduction. Coping mechanisms could reduce the effects of stressors on an individual by changing their emotional state during the situation or eliminating the source of stress (Lazarus, 1993, cited by Cancio et al., 2018). The researchers focused on using *active* and *adaptive* coping strategies by special education teachers who remained in the profession. *Active* coping strategies could include mentoring and social collegial support to help novice special education teachers positively cope with job-related stress and foster retention. Mentoring and collegial support provide novice special education teachers with emotional and instructional support that enhances their teaching abilities and boosts their emotional stability (Cancio et al., 2018). Professional development in workshops, conferences, networking, membership in professional organizations, and webinars also provided strategies and knowledge to novice teachers that could foster positive stress management to promote increased retention of novice special education teachers (Cancio et al., 2018). *Adaptive* coping involves yoga, sports, music, dance, exercise, or other extracurricular activities. In this study, the primary focus was on *active* coping skills. The limitations of this study revealed that the survey instrument was not tested for tested/retest reliability before

dissemination to the participant sample, and the convenience sampling was limited to only certified special education teachers, which limited the scope of representation. Future studies should engage a more extensive range of special education teacher positions.

The challenges that novice special education teachers face warrant discussing coping strategies to foster teacher retention and support appropriate instruction for students with disabilities. When teachers were overcome with stress, they could not maintain their proficiency in teaching and meet the needs of their students (Cancio et al., 2018; Haydon et al., 2018). The demands of large caseloads, excessive paperwork, student behavior, pressure for student achievement, and lack of clarity in their roles contrasted with the teacher's expectations of their role as a special education teacher, which could be perceived as stressors (Cancio, 2018; Haydon et al., 2018; Williams & Dikes, 2015). In addition, some of the literature cited special education teachers facing a lack of administrative support, feelings of isolation, and minimal collaboration with their colleagues.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

Recruiting and retaining novice special education teachers is a challenge. School administrations face the challenges of retaining special education teachers to teach students with disabilities (Warsame & Valles, 2018). Many of these teachers left the profession within the first 5 years of employment (Mason-Williams, 2015). The findings from the literature revealed that mentoring programs were a means to increase teacher retention. Induction programs that included mentoring programs provided support to

novice special education teachers. Novice special education teachers need mentoring programs that meet their needs as they face the challenges of the teaching profession.

The primary focus of this literature review was to explore sources related to novice special education teachers participating in mentoring programs. Additionally, sources concerned with teacher retention and novice special education teacher challenges were also explored. The literature exposed a gap in information on novice special education teachers that participated in mentoring programs. Several studies focused on large caseloads and lack of administrative support as a precursor for early departure from teaching (Hagaman & Casey, 2018; Newberry & Allsop, 2017; Samuels, 2018; Williams & Dikes, 2015). The literature also indicated stressful working conditions and feelings of isolation as reasons that novice special education teachers left the profession (Newberry & Allsop, 2017). In this study, I focused on narrowing the gap by highlighting the need for induction and mentoring programs specifically designed to support novice special education teachers.

### Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of novice special education teachers in urban schools in the northeastern region of the United States concerning their experience with mentoring programs towards improved retention, including motivation and relatedness as potential contributors to their intention to remain employed beyond five years, as defined by the self-determination theory. Mentoring is a structured collaboration where an experienced teacher (mentor) assists inexperienced or novice teachers in various aspects related to the profession's culture (Williams & Dikes, 2015). Participants were recruited using purposeful sampling through the distribution of invitation flyers via social media and email to recruit special education teachers participating in mentoring programs for novice teachers. Participants were individually interviewed using semi structured interviews that were audio recorded. The data was transcribed and analyzed (read and re-read) to determine codes and expose emerging themes (see Creswell & Poth, 2018). The culmination of data analysis resulted in a written discussion of the essence of mentoring for novice special education teachers.

Retaining novice elementary education teachers has presented a challenge to school leadership in the United States (Roegman et al., 2017). School districts usually implement teacher mentoring and induction programs to support novice teachers in the educational environment (Knackstedt et al., 2018). Induction and mentoring programs vary across school districts, but the goal remains consistent: to increase teacher retention.

In this chapter, I describe the following: research design, research questions, population and participants, instrumentation, data collection, data analysis, evidence of trustworthiness, and ethical procedures, followed by a chapter summary.

### **Research Design and Rationale**

The qualitative inquiry was the most appropriate design for this study. Limited information was available in the literature concerning novice special education teachers' exposure to mentoring programs. Therefore, I chose qualitative inquiry for this study to identify and report the lived experiences of novice special education teachers exposed to mentoring programs. Retention of novice special education teachers was a concern and challenge to school administrators. Mentoring has been one type of support given to novice teachers to support teacher retention. In this study, I interviewed participants using exploratory questions to gather data on novice teachers' experiences in mentoring programs. Potential participants were asked to complete an informed consent form after voluntarily agreeing to participate in the study. I also asked them to complete a demographics questionnaire (see Appendix A) to impart information concerning their educational status, years of teaching, and relationship with the researcher.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are novice special education teachers' lived experiences of their participation in a mentoring program?

2. What was the role of mentoring towards the retention according to the lived experiences of novice special education teachers who participated in a mentoring program?
3. What was the role of mentoring towards retention *motivation*, as a self-determination theory factor, according to the lived experiences of novice special education teachers?
4. What is the role of mentoring towards retention *relatedness*, as a self-determination theory factor, according to the lived experiences of novice special education teachers?
5. What is the role of mentoring towards retention *competence*, as a self-determination theory factor, according to the lived experiences of novice special education teachers?

### **Central Concepts of the Study**

The central phenomenon addressed in this study was novice special education teachers' experiences in mentoring programs. Special education teacher retention and attrition continues to be a problem and intensifies teacher shortages, especially among special education teachers (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019; Mason-Williams & Gagnon, 2017). Mentoring programs have been used as a means to increase teacher retention.

School administrators have employed induction programs that included mentoring for novice teachers to remediate teacher attrition and improve teacher retention. The literature reviewed in Chapter 2 revealed the importance of providing novice teachers with professional support through induction programs, mentoring programs, professional

development, and administrative support. Unfortunately, these types of teacher support vary widely. Moreover, research needed to be more extensive on the development and impact of induction and mentoring for novice special education teachers. I explored the perceptions of novice special education teachers to gain a deeper understanding of their experiences in mentoring programs.

### **Research Tradition and Rationale**

A qualitative approach was appropriate for this study because this approach facilitated a deeper understanding of the novice special education teachers' mentoring experiences (see Trochim et al., 2016). There were advantages to conducting qualitative research over quantitative research. First, qualitative research is a naturalistic form of inquiry focused on telling detailed stories to describe a phenomenon from a participant's perspective (Trochim et al., 2016). The qualitative inquiry also enables researchers to find new theories, constructs, or hypotheses and gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon experienced by the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Trochim et al., 2016). Another advantage of qualitative inquiry is that a researcher can spend time in the environment where the phenomenon under study was developed and existed (Trochim et al., 2016). Finally, this research method enabled me to report realistic findings using purposeful samples describing the phenomenon.

In contrast, quantitative research deals with numbers, and participants are chosen by random sampling. Quantitative research is experimental and involves summarizing large portions of data using statistical estimations (Trochim et al., 2016). The data analysis for quantitative inquiry also uses standardized comparisons and accounting for

variance (Trochim et al., 2016). In addition, the quantitative inquiry does not provide rich, detailed descriptions of a phenomenon from a participant's perspective (Trochim et al., 2016). Therefore, a qualitative inquiry was more appropriate for this study because it provided a deeper understanding of the phenomena from a participant's perspective (Trochim et al., 2016). The detailed accounts of the participants' lived experiences with mentoring shed light on its impact on special education teacher retention.

### **Research Tradition: Qualitative Inquiry**

I explored four qualitative approaches before selecting the phenomenological approach for this study. Ethnographic research involves the study of a cultural group over an extensive period. Grounded theory entails an ongoing study of an action, process, or interaction of different groups. A case study requires the exploration of an event, program, or process with one or several participants using a variety of data collection over time, and narrative research involves the study of individuals' stories about their lives or events (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Trochim et al., 2016). These other qualitative approaches were not chosen because they would not have provided for the exploration of the lived experiences of special education teachers engaged in mentoring programs for novice teachers about improved retention.

### **Research Tradition: Phenomenological Approach**

The phenomenological approach provided for collecting and interpreting the lived experiences of mentoring through descriptive stories collected from a purposeful sample of participants. The focus of this study was to explore and understand the essence of the lived experiences of novice special education teachers in mentoring programs.

Phenomenological research involves descriptions of experiences instead of explanations or analyses (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). This approach provided a more in-depth, realistic understanding of the kind of experiences novice special education teachers have in mentoring programs.

I reviewed two types of phenomenology: hermeneutic and transcendental.

Hermeneutic phenomenology involves the interpretation of the text to uncover the actual meaning behind the author's intentions (Moustakas, 1994). Edmund Husserl systematically introduced transcendental phenomenology to prevent bias concerning a phenomenon being investigated using epoché (Moustakas, 1994). Transcendental phenomenology describes an experience by the individual having that experience (Moustakas, 1994). The aim of this approach is to explore and provide information about the phenomenon of study through comprehensive descriptions. Transcendental phenomenology varies from hermeneutic phenomenology since it emphasizes setting aside preconceived opinions of the phenomenon being studied and developing a clear picture of the experiences from the participant's exposure to the phenomenon (van Manen, 2014). Transcendental phenomenology enabled me to understand the lived experiences of novice special education teachers in mentoring programs.

### **Rationale for the Chosen Tradition**

A qualitative approach was the most appropriate for this study to gain information of the phenomenon being studied. Specifically, I provided information about the phenomenon being studied using a transcendental phenomenological reduction (TPR) approach to gather information on the lived experiences of novice special education

teachers exposed to mentoring programs. Using the TPR approach helped me acquire the substance of the phenomenon and foster a clear understanding of the factors that emerge from analysis of the perceptions of novice special education teachers' mentoring experiences (see Moustakas, 1994).

This study was proposed in response to the shortage of special education teachers. Moreover, a small amount of current literature was available regarding the needs of novice special education teachers in urban schools. It was essential for researchers using qualitative inquiry to decide on the most appropriate approach to facilitate the study of the research problem. I gathered data using face-to-face interviews with novice special education teachers to explore their perceptions and experiences in mentoring programs. In-depth interviews are the data collection of choice for phenomenological studies (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The participants' perspectives were the primary source of data collected (see Moustakas, 1994). I also conducted a follow-up meeting to allow the participants to review, clarify, or add to the information they provided during their interview.

### **Role of the Researcher**

My goal for this research was to explore and understand lived experiences of novice special education teachers' experiences in mentoring programs (Moustakas, 1994; Creswell & Poth, 2018). My function was that of sole researcher and observer-participant in this study. I interviewed each participant to understand their lived experiences regarding their exposure to mentoring programs. As the investigator in this study, I interviewed the participants and served to verify the information as needed. I did not

anticipate any personal or professional relationships with prospective participants.

Member checking was used, and I provided a respectful environment to avoid any power issues and reassure the prospective participants of the confidentiality and anonymity of their identities.

The first step in the phenomenological approach was *epoché*. Researchers use epoché to set aside any biases and preconceived ideas to enable the evolution of data (Moustakas, 1994), thereby addressing biases within the initial stages of inquiry (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Using a self-reflection journal to log my personal reactions, I declared my biases concerning the topic. My interest in this study was based on my status as a special education teacher. I was concerned about the type of exposure to mentoring programs that novice special education teachers received. However, my role as a researcher and colleague in the study environment was not used to influence the decisions of teachers to participate in the study, nor were professional, supervisory, power relationship, professional or financial inducements used to recruit participants.

Participation in the study was voluntary. A purposeful sample was acquired by distributing invitation flyers via social media and email to novice special education teachers in the northeast region of the United States. I ensured that the participants understood that participation was voluntary. Prospective participants received an invitation to participate in the study. Participants had the option to decline or withdraw their participation in the study at any time without any consequences.

Interviews were conducted respectfully and impartially to facilitate an environment that made the participant to feel comfortable responding and elaborating on

the interview questions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I consulted each participant to determine a time free from distractions to interview and used an audio-conferencing portal to facilitate social distancing. In addition, the rights of each participant were protected through informed consent. I endeavored to establish respectful dialogue and collaboration (see Creswell & Poth, 2018). Finally, I was amenable to any participant concerns or requests.

## **Research Methods**

### **Participant Selection**

The population targeted for this study were novice special education teachers with up to five years of experience teaching in an urban public school in the northeastern region of the United States. I solicited a purposeful sample of novice special education teachers, with the additional criterion of having experience in a mentoring program. Purposeful sampling is the most used type in qualitative inquiry and entails selecting a small number of participants that may or may not represent the whole population (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A purposeful sample in qualitative inquiry helps the researcher select the most appropriate participants to answer interview questions about the phenomenon being explored.

The sample size for the current study consisted of 10 participants. This range was consistent with phenomenological studies by Luckowski (2016) and Moriarty-Daley & Polifroni (2018), who used 10–13 interviews to achieve saturation in each of their studies. The connection between saturation and sample size may prompt using a larger or smaller sample (Creswell & Poth, 2018). *Saturation* is the point at which no new data is

expected to emerge from additional qualitative interviews (Turner-Bowker et al., 2018). Therefore, sampling in this study ceased when additional interviews failed to produce new information.

Prospective participants were recruited through the distribution of invitation flyers via social media to recruit novice special education teachers in mentoring programs. Invitation flyers were also emailed to novice special education teachers in mentoring programs within the northeastern region of the United States to ensure achieving the minimum sample of participants.

Potential participants were recruited based on their willingness to participate in this study. Perspective participants were asked to complete a demographics questionnaire (see Appendix A) to supply information about their teaching status, geographic location, years of teaching, and experience in mentoring programs after they agreed to participate in this study. I reminded prospective participants that participation in this study was voluntary.

Upon conclusion that the teacher had met the inclusion criteria, they were designated as a potential participant. Each potential participant received an informed consent form and had an opportunity to discuss the study with me, ask any questions, or state any concerns prior to signing the completed form.

The recruitment of prospective participants was based on a purposeful sample of each participant being a special education teacher with 1–5 years of experience teaching in the northeastern region of the United States and having exposure to mentoring programs. I thanked the prospective participants for agreeing to participate in this study. I

explained to the participants that the interviews would be conducted via audio recording using a conferencing portal to facilitate social distancing. Then, I asked for their agreement to participate in the interview and a follow-up meeting to review their responses for clarity. The potential participants agreed to grant me the right to publish the aggregated data in a doctoral dissertation.

### **Instrumentation**

I was the primary instrument during this study, using a semi structured interview protocol with open-ended questions (see Appendix B). The interview protocol served as a guide that consisted of broad questions designed to provide detailed descriptions of the phenomenon using semi structured face-to-face interviews (Moustakas, 1994). Changing the sequence of questions demonstrated flexibility during the interview; however, all questions were addressed during each interview (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This procedure helped to ensure that data collection instruments were adequate to support the trustworthiness of the data collected on mentoring for novice special education teachers.

The research questions emerged from gaps in the literature that pointed to a need for more current literature on mentoring for novice special education teachers. The research questions were developed to engage the study participants in an open discussion of their experiences to enable the me to understand their experiences in mentoring programs. Research questions relating to the self-determination theory imparted the impact of motivation, relatedness, and competence on the retention of special education teachers. I used an interview protocol to maintain an alignment of the research and interview questions. Before conducting the interviews, I had three colleagues/experts in

the field of education review and provided feedback on the interview questions to determine the clarity and organization of the questions in promoting an inquiry-based conversation.

### **Procedures for Recruitment and Participation**

This study was comprised of individual interviews of novice special education teachers exposed to mentoring programs in the northeastern United States. I conducted all interviews that were audio recorded via Zoom conferencing portal (<https://zoom.us>). Interviews were scheduled at a time that was convenient for each participant. The study participants consisted of participants who met the inclusion criteria and agreed in writing to participate in the study. Of the 10 participants, two initially stated that they were not assigned a mentor in their school prior to the interview. One was mentored by her uncle and her college professor, who was not employed in her school or district. The other participant was not assigned a mentor by her school or district. However, she enlisted the support of a senior special education teacher, and he supported her throughout the year. Even though these participants were not formally assigned mentors, they were able to provide information to several interview questions concerning the impact of mentoring through the support they received from their unauthentic experiences. Data collection in phenomenological studies was gathered using interviews (Moustakas, 1994). Participants were willing to participate in face-to-face interviews and a short follow-up meeting. The interview lasted approximately 45 minutes to complete. Each participant completed and signed an informed consent form, which attested to their voluntary participation, agreement to an interview, and follow-up meeting to provide clarification. Participants

agreed to permit the interview to be audio recorded in a conferencing portal to facilitate social distancing and agreed that the findings be published in aggregate form in a doctoral dissertation and a journal article.

If there were difficulty recruiting participants for this purposeful sample, I accepted recommendations from colleagues of novice special education teachers engaged in mentoring programs. I continuously distributed invitation flyers via social media and emails throughout the recruitment process. I also used the Walden University Participant Pool to recruit participants.

### **Data Collection**

Research data collection consists of gathering data regarding a concern or issue (Trochim et al., 2016). There are four types of data collection in qualitative research: interviews, observation, documentation, and audiovisual analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Following the recruitment of the study participants, each participant was asked to complete a demographic questionnaire and then engage in an initial interview and a follow-up meeting to ascertain clarification. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), data collection for phenomenological inquiry involved gathering data through in-depth interviews. Audio recordings were conducted using a conferencing portal during each interview to facilitate social distancing.

A semi structured interview protocol containing open-ended questions were utilized in this study (see Appendix B). Each participant was presented with the same questions. Using a semi structured approach permitted the addition of added questions when clarification was needed. To maintain confidentiality, I used pseudonyms to protect

the identities of the participants. After each interview, each participant received thanks for their participation and apprised of a follow-up meeting. As the researcher, I paid attention to participants' responses and voices for consistent candor in truthfulness of the answers. Each participant was reminded that they would receive a \$5 gift card as a "thank you" gift for participating in the study.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

As the researcher, I functioned as the sole analyst of the study. A semi structured interview protocol was used during each interview. Epoché is the first step in phenomenological research and was conducted throughout the study using a reflective journal. Epoché entailed my setting aside or bracketing preconceptions by openly stating any personal perspectives I might have, in written form, in a reflective journal (Moustakas, 1994). Throughout the study, I wrote down any personal statements to divulge my experiences or thoughts on special education teachers engaged in mentoring programs for novice teachers and how my experiences might influence interpretations of the data. Revealing my preconceptions enabled me to focus on the information discussed with the participants during the interviews without interjecting my own experiences. Audio recordings of each interview were transcribed verbatim. The data were analyzed to collect emerging themes regarding how novice special education teachers described the meanings and essence of their mentoring experience.

The listing and grouping of relevant expressions to the experience of the phenomenon were conducted through horizontalization (Moustakas, 1994). Each participant's transcript was read repeatedly to eliminate statements that were vague,

overlapping, or not representative of the mentoring experiences of the participants (Moustakas, 1994). The remaining statements represented the meaning units or horizons of the experience used to describe the phenomenon in descriptive terms (Moustakas, 1994). The horizons of the experiences were called invariant constituents that were grouped and related to themes in clustering (Moustakas, 1994). The invariant constituents and themes were checked against the transcript of each participant to ensure that the expressed themes were reflected or compatible and non-relevant constituents would be included (Moustakas, 1994). Individual textual descriptions were constructed using verbatim examples taken from the transcribed interviews to compose textual descriptions of the meaning and essence of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). The individual textual descriptions were used to construct structural descriptions of the phenomenon that focused on the underlying themes that accounted for the connection between the participants' feelings and thoughts regarding the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). The combination of individual textual and structural descriptions was combined to construct a composite description of the meanings and essences of the participant group experiences to develop an understanding of each participant's experience with the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher indicated discrepant cases by documenting differences in the interviews. Discrepant information that contradicted the identified themes was presented with the findings to ensure reliability (Creswell & Poth, 2018). NVivo (Windows) data analysis software was used to assist in organizing and coding the data.

### **Issues of Trustworthiness**

Concerns of trustworthiness are important in all research. Attaining a study's trustworthiness (rigor) involves having confidence in the reliability and validity of the results (Morse, 2015). According to Stiles (1993), *reliability* deals with the trustworthiness of observations, data, and the capacity to reproduce study responses, while *validity* deals with the trustworthiness of interpretations and conclusions. My preconceived beliefs were set aside to ensure reliability and validity.

The epoché process was used through the transcendental approach to set aside prejudgments regarding mentoring for special education teachers (Moustakas, 1994). The use of bracketing helped set aside preconceptions concerning mentoring to avoid influencing the findings.

### **Credibility**

Credibility was a factor in maintaining trustworthiness in qualitative research. The use of member checks ensured credibility and validity (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Trochim et al., 2016). Member checking was used to provide each participant with the opportunity to check the accuracy and clarity of their perspectives expressed during the interviews through a follow-up meeting.

Saturation also supported credibility by ensuring data collection had been exhausted within the categories and had become redundant as far as the responses from the participants. Saturation was the point at which no new data were expected to emerge from conducting additional qualitative interviews (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Turner-Bowker et al., 2018). During the data collection, saturation was reached when no new

information appeared from additional interviews to support an understanding of the categories. In this study, I achieved saturation after interviewing 10 participants, so additional recruitment was not necessary.

### **Transferability**

Transferability is another factor in maintaining trustworthiness. Transferability refers to how the results of the research could be transferred into other settings (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Trochim et al., 2016). To promote transferability, I used a purposeful sample and rich, detailed descriptions, otherwise called thick descriptions, when reporting on the participants' perspectives and the study's findings. The data could be transferable to other schools and teachers since the participants represented varied experiences with mentoring programs for novice special education teachers.

### **Dependability**

An audit trail was used to enhance dependability. The audit trail involved an explanation of the methods of the study, sample selection, data collection process and analysis, and discussion on how the researcher addresses validity and reliability (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). I kept a journal that contained a detailed account of how the data collection and data analysis process was conducted.

### **Confirmability**

Reflexivity and an audit trail were used to enhance confirmability. Trochim et al. (2016) refer to confirmability as the degree to which others can corroborate the study results. In this study, reflexivity was used to support confirmability. Reflexivity assisted me in uncovering personal biases, prejudices, and past experiences that were brought to

the research study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The participants member checked the findings to confirm that their experiences were accurate. Using bracketing and reflection helped to ensure credibility and support trustworthiness in this study.

An interview protocol was used to expand and strengthen consistency throughout the interview process. The interview protocol ensured that each participant addressed the same questions. The use of the interview protocol enhanced the confirmability of the interview process.

### **Ethical Procedures**

I obtained permission to conduct the study from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Walden University. Before conducting the study, each participant read and asked questions about the study and the informed consent form. They were ensured that no harm or risk would affect them by participating in the study. As the researcher, I emphasized that participation in this study was voluntary, their personal information would not be shared, and their confidentiality would be protected. Participants received information that the study would be reported in aggregate form, and pseudonyms would be utilized instead of participants' names. The data would be collected on a password protected flash drive, locked in a file cabinet accessible to me, the researcher and destroyed five years upon completion of the study.

### **Summary**

This qualitative study was conducted in response to the shortage of special education teachers in urban schools and aimed to gain knowledge and a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of novice special education teachers involved in

mentoring programs in urban schools in the northeastern United States. The research was limited to the development and impact of induction and mentoring for novice special education teachers.

A transcendental phenomenological approach was used in this study to explore novice special education teachers' lived experiences regarding their exposure to mentoring programs. The outcome of this study would uncover the specific needs and concerns regarding mentoring programs for novice special education teachers. The goal of conducting this study was to promote positive social change in the development and implementation of mentoring programs for novice special education teachers in urban schools within the United States.

As the sole researcher and observer participant, I conducted interviews using an audio recording on a conferencing portal to gain knowledge and a deeper understanding of sampled participants lived experiences regarding their exposure to mentoring programs. Before conducting interviews, I used epoché to set aside any bias and preconceived ideas to allow the data to evolve (Moustakas, 1994). Any bias and preconceived ideas were documented in a self-reflection journal. As a special education teacher, I was concerned about the novice special education teachers' exposure to mentoring programs.

Prospective participants were recruited by dispersing invitation flyers via social media to recruit special education teachers who were engaged in mentoring programs. In addition, dispersal of invitation flyers were distributed to novice special education teachers in mentoring programs to garner volunteers for the study. All prospective

participants were asked to complete a demographic questionnaire and provide informed consent to attest to their willingness to participate voluntarily in the study.

An open-ended semi structured interview protocol was used in this qualitative study. The interview protocol was used as a guide to generate detailed descriptions of the phenomenon being studied. All questions were aligned with the research questions and facilitated an inquiry-based conversation to gain a deep understanding of the lived experiences of novice special education teachers involved in mentoring programs. In addition, I had colleagues review the interview protocol to ensure that the questions aligned with the research questions and facilitated a conversation that would reveal information pertinent to the study. Each participant answered the same questions. During the interviews, added questions were included, if necessary, to enhance clarification and explanations of vague areas. Pseudonyms were used to maintain confidentiality, to protect the identities of the participants.

Data analysis was consistent with techniques appropriate for the analysis of audio-recorded interviews. In addressing trustworthiness, the data was transcribed, member-checked, and open-coded. A password protected flash drive contained the data in a locked file cabinet that would only be accessible to me, the researcher. This information will be kept for five years after the completion of the study.

The expectation was that the outcome of this study would draw attention to the needs of novice special education teachers. The intent of conducting this study was that the outcome could promote social change through the development of mentoring programs that foster support and retention of special education teachers. In Chapter 4, I

discuss the study's setting, participants' demographics, data collection, data analysis, evidence of trustworthiness, result, and a summary.

## Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenology study was to explore the lived experiences of novice special education teachers in urban schools in the northeastern region of the United States concerning their actual experiences with mentoring programs.

The research questions for this study were as follows:

1. What are novice special education teachers' lived experiences of their participation in a mentoring program?
2. What is the role of mentoring towards retention according to the lived experiences of novice special education teachers who participated in a mentoring program?
3. What is the role of mentoring towards retention using *motivation*, as a self-determination theory factor, according to the lived experiences of novice special education teachers?
4. What is the role of mentoring towards retention using *relatedness*, as a self-determination theory factor, according to the lived experiences of novice special education teachers?
5. What is the role of mentoring towards retention using *competence*, as a self-determination theory factor, according to the lived experiences of novice special education teachers?

I recruited and interviewed 10 participants who responded to open-ended interview questions. Of the 10 participants, two initially stated that they were not assigned a mentor in their school prior to the interview. One was mentored by her uncle

and her college professor, who were not employed in her school or district. The other participant was not assigned a mentor by her school or district. However, she enlisted the support of a senior special education teacher, and he supported her throughout the year. Even though these participants were not formally assigned mentors, they were able to provide information to several interview questions concerning the impact of mentoring through the support they received from their experiences. Participants overwhelmingly felt that mentoring is a necessity for novice special education teachers. Chapter 4 includes a discussion of the setting, demographics of participants, data collection, data analysis, themes, evidence of trustworthiness, and a summary.

### **Setting**

The study was designed to recruit novice special education teachers who had exposure to mentoring programs. I initially anticipated inviting more than 10 special education teachers from the same educational school system but different school districts to participate in this research study. However, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic altered those plans. The COVID-19 pandemic prevented in-person interviews. The IRB for the educational school system declined to accept any external proposals for research in their school system. Upon consultation with the Walden University IRB, they recommended using social media to recruit the participants. Walden University's IRB reviewed and approved the new plan to recruit and interview 10 special education teachers via social media and email (Approval No. 12-16-20-0019332). I sent a list of interview questions to three experts. These experts were educators who were connected to teaching and special education. One expert was a school psychologist with more than

15 years working with students with disabilities, another was a teacher with more than 20 years as a dean and teaching students with disabilities, and the third was an assistant professor teaching special education courses. The experts requested only a few grammatical changes to the wording of the interview protocol. I made the proposed changes in the wording within the interview protocol, and it satisfied the experts' request.

I distributed invitation flyers for the research study via social media portals and email. The research study was posted on the Walden University Participant Pool. The invitation flyer invited special education teachers interested in sharing their experiences regarding their exposure to mentoring programs to contact me directly and included my contact information.

All contact was conducted via email. The potential participants received an informed consent form after they emailed me of their interest to participate in the study. They were also allowed to have any issues addressed or ask questions prior to consenting to participate in the study. After receiving each participant's email consent, interviews were scheduled and confirmed. A Zoom link was also sent to each participant prior to the date of the scheduled interview. Validation of each transcript was conducted via email as per the participant agreement. The interviews were conducted over a period of five months with novice special education teachers throughout the northeastern region of the United States via the Zoom conferencing portal (<https://zoom.us>).

### **Demographics**

Ten novice special education teachers participated in the study. All participants were female; four identified as White/Caucasian, and six identified as Black/African

American. All participants identified as special education teachers with no more than five years of experience teaching special education classes. The participants ranged in age from 30-50+ years. Table 1 represents the demographic breakdown of participants. These pseudonyms also appear in the Results section to maintain confidentiality.

**Table 1**

*Participants' Demographic Information*

Pseudonym	Race/Gender	Age	Highest degree	Yrs. teaching special education	Job title
Amber	White/Female	30	MS	5	Self-contained elementary
	Black/Female	30	BS	4.5	Self-contained elementary
Ada	White/Female	31	MS	5	Setts/co-teacher middle school
Alison	Black/Female	32	BS	3.5	Self-contained elementary
Ana	Black/Female	33	BS	4	Self-contained middle school
Doris	Black/Female	39	MS	4	Self-contained elementary
Audrey	Black/Female	40	BS	5	Self-contained elementary
Ava	White/Female	40	MS	5	Self-contained elementary
Alicia	White/Female	46	MS +30	2	High school English
Alice	White/Female	50+	MS	3.5	Self-contained elementary

*Note.* Demographics of special education teachers who have engaged in mentoring programs for novice teachers.

### Data Collection

The 10 interviews were scheduled over a five month period with confirmed dates and times for each participant via e-mail using the Zoom conferencing portal due to COVID-19 precautionary measures of social distancing that were in place. I conducted interviews based on the availability of the participants.

I discussed the purpose of the study with each participant before the interview. To determine each participant's eligibility, we engaged in a discussion of the demographic questionnaire. I also discussed the consent form with each participant to confirm their understanding of the study.

The interviews consisted of semi structured questions and the interview protocol (see Appendix B) with probing questions to assist in further clarification during the interviews. I asked the same questions; however, I changed the order of the interview and probed questions as needed. The length of each recorded interview ranged from 40–55 minutes.

Throughout each interview, I was attentive to the participants' responses. During the first two interviews, I did not receive decisive responses to my two questions:

1. Describe your experiences as a new special education teacher receiving mentoring?
2. Tell me about your mentor?

Therefore it became evident that each interview begins with the definition of mentoring, which was consistent in the literature review. I added probing questions about how the participants were assigned a mentor. I also asked probing questions on the impact of mentoring on the development of IEPs.

At the end of each interview, I informed each participant that I would provide them with a transcript of the interview to confirm that the information was accurate. All interviews were audio recorded via the Zoom conference portal (<https://zoom.us>). I saved and transferred the audio files to a secure drive for transcription. After each interview, I

allowed time using epoché to bracket my preconceptions and listened to the audio recordings at least twice prior to transcribing the participants' responses. Then, I typed the transcripts while carefully listening to the audio files to compare the transcription. After transcription, I forwarded the transcription in the form of a Word document to the participants via email for validation of the transcription. All of the participants engaged in member checking to ensure credibility by providing feedback through a review of the transcription of their interview to determine accuracy via email.

After the participants member checked and validated their transcript, initial coding began. Preliminary coding helped direct some questions with probes in the remaining interviews. By the tenth interview, repetition in the data occurred. No new data patterns of information emerged, and the data reached saturation. I stored the consent replies, demographic questionnaires, and interview transcripts in a locked cabinet to keep the participants' identities confidential. I also uploaded transcripts of the recorded interviews to the NVivo (Windows) data analysis platform on a secure flash drive.

### **Data Analysis**

To fully absorb the essence of the participants' experiences, interviews commenced with open-ended questions using a Zoom conferencing portal (<https://zoom.us>). Then I transcribed the interview responses while listening to the audio recordings. Audio recordings of each interview were transcribed verbatim. After validating the transcripts through member checking, I assigned pseudonyms as unique identifiers for each participant before importing the transcripts into NVivo (Windows).

Then, I created a case classification node to store the demographics and auto-coded each transcript to compare responses from participants.

The data analysis was conducted using the modified van Kaam process (see Moustakas, 1994). Epoché was conducted throughout the study. I used epoché to set aside or bracket any preconceptions by openly stating any personal perspectives I might have in a reflective journal. Throughout the study, I wrote down any personal statements to divulge my experiences or thoughts on special education teachers engaged in mentoring programs for novice teachers and how my experiences might influence my interpretations of the data. Revealing my preconceptions enabled me to focus on the information discussed with the participants during the interviews without interjecting my own experiences.

The data was analyzed to collect emerging themes regarding how novice special education teachers described the meanings and essence of their mentoring experience. The listing and grouping of relevant expressions to the experience of the phenomenon were conducted through horizontalization (see Moustakas, 1994). Each participant's transcript was read repeatedly to eliminate statements that were vague, overlapping, or not representative of the mentoring experiences of the participants (Moustakas, 1994). The remaining statements represented the meaning units or horizons of the experience used to describe the phenomenon in descriptive terms (Moustakas, 1994). The horizons of the experiences were called invariant constituents that were grouped and related to themes in clustering (Moustakas, 1994). The invariant constituents and themes were checked against the transcript of each participant to ensure that the expressed themes

were reflected or compatible and non-relevant constituents would be included (Moustakas, 1994). Individual textual descriptions were constructed using verbatim examples taken from the transcribed interviews to compose textual descriptions of the meaning and essence of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). The individual textual descriptions were used to construct structural descriptions of the phenomenon that focused on the underlying themes that accounted for the connection between the participants' feelings and thoughts regarding the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). The combination of individual textual and structural descriptions created a composite description of the meanings and essences of the participant group experiences to develop an understanding of each participant's experience with the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). I indicated discrepant cases by documenting differences in the interviews. Discrepant information that contradicted the identified themes was presented with the findings to ensure reliability (Creswell & Poth, 2018). NVivo ( Windows) was used to assist in organizing and coding the data.

The following themes emerged from the data analysis process:

- Theme 1: Exposure to formal or informal mentoring
- Theme 2: Limited accessibility of the mentor
- Theme 3: Mentors help improve teaching
- Theme 4: Development of confidence through mentoring aids in retention
- Theme 5: Motivation to remain in teaching not related only to mentoring
- Theme 6: Development of relatedness through mentoring
- Theme 7: Development of competence through mentoring aids in retention

## **Themes Associated With Research Question 1**

Research Question 1: What are novice special education teachers' lived experiences of their participation in a mentoring program? I asked participants questions regarding their exposure to mentoring?

### ***Theme 1: Exposure to Formal or Informal Mentoring***

This theme concerned the exposure to mentoring as perceived by special education teachers within their initial years of teaching. Before the interview, all participants stated that they participated in a mentoring program in their school. During the interviews, participants went into detail about their exposure to mentoring. Their responses varied, with several participants describing formal mentoring programs and others describing informal mentoring relationships with veteran teachers. Most participants felt that they had exposure to mentoring.

### ***Theme 2: Limited Accessibility of the Mentor***

This theme involved the accessibility of the mentor as perceived by special education teachers within their initial years of teaching. Participants shared their perceptions of the accessibility of their mentors. The responses varied concerning the types of mentoring they received. In general, most participants found their mentors less accessible than they would like.

### ***Theme 3: Mentors Help Improve Teaching***

This theme illustrated the improvement of teaching practice as perceived by the participants that engaged in mentoring programs. Participants shared their perceived

successes that they experienced while participating in mentoring programs. The responses varied in a discussion of participants' perceived perception of success.

### **Themes Associated With Research Question 2**

Research Question 2: What is the role of mentoring towards retention according to the lived experiences of novice special education teachers who participated in a mentoring program? I asked participants how their mentoring experiences impacted them to remain in the teaching profession. Participants shared their perception of mentoring building their confidence in using various tools and strategies to meet the needs of their students.

#### ***Theme 4: Development of Confidence Through Mentoring Aids in Retention***

This theme dealt with mentoring programs' impact on special education teachers' confidence. In addition, this theme also included a discussion of the impact of mentoring for the retention of special education teachers. Participants spoke about their perception of how participation in a mentoring program impacted their confidence as special education teacher and their intention to remain in the teaching profession. Most participants viewed mentoring as impacting their confidence as teachers.

### **Themes Associated With Research Question 3**

Research Question 3: What is the role of mentoring towards retention using *motivation*, as a self-determination theory factor, according to the lived experiences of novice special education teachers who participated in a mentoring program?

I asked participants to share the impact of mentoring on their motivation to remain in teaching.

***Theme 5: Motivation to Remain in Teaching Not Related Only to Mentoring***

This theme dealt with the impact of mentoring programs on motivation in special education teachers. In addition, this theme also included a discussion of the impact of mentoring using self-determination theory for the retention of special education teachers. Participants spoke about their perception of how participation in a mentoring program impacted their motivation as special education teacher and their intention to remain in the teaching profession.

**Themes Associated With Research Question 4**

Research Question 4: What is the role of mentoring towards retention using *relatedness, as a self-determination theory factor*, according to the lived experiences of novice special education teachers who participated in a mentoring program?

Participants shared their perceptions of how mentoring impacted their feelings of belonging and being respected by their peers.

***Theme 6: Development of Relatedness Through Mentoring***

This theme dealt with the impact of mentoring programs on relatedness in special education teachers. In addition, this theme also included a discussion of the impact of mentoring using self-determination theory for the retention of special education teachers. Participants spoke about their perception of how participation in a mentoring program impacted their relatedness as special education teacher and their intention to remain in the teaching profession. As a whole, it seemed that most teachers felt that participation in mentoring impacted their relatedness.

## **Themes Associated With Research Question 5**

Research Question 4: What is the role of mentoring towards retention using *competence, as a self-determination theory factor*, according to the lived experiences of novice special education teachers who participated in a mentoring program? Participants were asked to share the impact of mentoring on their competence as a teacher.

### ***Theme 7: Development of Competence Through Mentoring Aids in Retention***

This theme dealt with the impact of mentoring programs on the competence of special education teachers. In addition, this theme also included a discussion of the impact of mentoring using self-determination theory for the retention of special education teachers. Participants spoke about their perception of how participation in a mentoring program impacted their competence as special education teacher and their intention to remain in the teaching profession. Most teachers viewed mentoring as having an impact on their competence as teachers.

## **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

### **Credibility**

Credibility was a factor in maintaining trustworthiness in this qualitative research. Qualitative research was used to describe or understand the phenomenon as seen through the eyes of the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Trochim et al., 2016). The use of member checks ensured credibility and validity in this research study. Member checking was conducted for the transcription of each interview. Each participant was sent an email of their transcribed interview. Member checking assisted in maintaining credibility. Each

participant had the opportunity of providing feedback by checking the accuracy and clarity of their perspectives from the interviews during a follow-up meeting.

### **Transferability**

Transferability is another factor in maintaining trustworthiness in this qualitative research. Transferability refers to how the results of the research could be transferred into other settings (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Trochim et al., 2016). To promote transferability, I used a purposeful sample and detailed descriptions, otherwise called thick descriptions, when reporting on the participants' perspectives and the study's findings. The data could be transferable to other schools and teachers since the participants represented varied experiences with mentoring programs for novice special education teachers.

### **Dependability**

An audit trail was used to enhance dependability. The audit trail involved an explanation of the methods of the study, sample selection, data collection process analysis, and a discussion on how the researcher addressed validity and reliability (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). I kept a journal that contained an account of how the data collection and data analysis process was conducted.

### **Confirmability**

In this study, reflexivity supported confirmability. During this phenomenological study, the epoché process was used to set aside prejudgments regarding the issue under investigation (Moustakas, 1994). Bracketing helped me set aside preconceptions concerning the phenomenon to avoid any experiences that might influence the findings. Saturation was obtained after interviewing 10 participants, so no additional recruitment

was necessary. Saturation was the point at which no new data emerged from conducting additional qualitative interviews (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Turner-Bowker et al., 2018).

Data analysis was consistent with techniques appropriate for the analysis of audio-recorded interviews. I transcribed, reviewed then open-coded the data. Member-checking ensured accuracy and addressed trustworthiness. A password-protected flash drive contained the data collected locked in a file cabinet only accessible to me, the researcher and kept for five years, then destroyed.

### **Results**

This qualitative phenomenological study focused on the experiences of special education teachers engaged in mentoring programs for novice teachers in urban schools. Novice special education teachers were asked open-ended questions during the interview process. The organization of the study results addressed answers to each research question using themes. The themes were supported with quotes from the participants' responses.

The results of this study contributed to the understanding of special education teachers participating in a mentoring program for novice teachers. The participants give voice to novice special education teachers' needs regarding mentoring programs. Overall, all participants concurred that mentoring is necessary for novice special education teachers. However, program scheduling and mentor assignments should foster appropriate mentor-mentee matches. Mentees must be matched with mentors who teach within the same curriculum area and have expertise in all aspects of the duties of special

education teachers. While experiences may vary, themes regarding experiences, perceptions, and accessibility were evident.

### **Theme 1: Exposure to Formal or Informal Mentoring**

All participants felt they had exposure to mentoring, though for some, it was an formal mentoring relationship, and for others, it was informal. One participant was mentored by an experienced general education kindergarten teacher who had no experience working with students with disabilities. One participant was not assigned a mentor, but she enlisted the assistance and support of an experienced special education teacher who provided ongoing support. Lastly, another participant was not assigned a mentor, but received support from one of her professors outside the school.

In general, most participants felt they had some exposure to their mentors. For example, Abby stated that she had exposure to her mentor daily in the classroom. Doris seemed satisfied with her exposure to her mentor, reporting that her mentor was an experienced special education teacher, and “She met with me weekly to plan my lessons using the school curriculum. She modeled lessons and observed as I taught.” Alison was not assigned a mentor, but she had exposure to mentoring by enlisting the support of an experienced special education teacher. She referred to this teacher as her mentor. She shared, “I did not understand the school and how to teach students with disabilities. My mentor helped me feel comfortable within the school. He was there when for problems or questions.”

Alicia stated that she was unaware that the teacher helping her was assigned to mentor her. She expressed, “During my first year, I had a mentor, but I did not know she

was assigned to me. I felt grateful for her help. She was very helpful and spent time working with me in the classroom. I did not want to take up her time and felt guilty. My second year was a different experience because I was officially told that I was assigned a mentor.” Not all participants felt that exposure was sufficient, however. Alice, for example, expressed her exposure to mentoring in this way: “My mentoring was a joke. I was mentored by a kindergarten general education teacher who had no idea about anything with special education. I lean on the district Autism Coordinator and my paraprofessionals when there is anything pressing.”

**Table 2**

*Exposure to Formal and Informal Mentoring*

Participants	Exposure	Limited exposure	No exposure
Abby	X		
Alice		X	
Alicia	X		
Doris	X		
Audrey	X		
Amber	X		
Ana			X
Ada	X		
Avery			X
Alison	X		

To summarize, as seen in Table 2, a frequent response by the participants in this study was that while most of the mentors were experienced special education teachers, the schools did not allot scheduled times for mentoring services within their schedules. Seven of the 10 participants stated that they had exposure to mentoring. One stated limited exposure to mentoring. Two participants did state exposure to mentoring.

However, their description of exposure to mentoring for special education teachers was inconsistent with the definition used for this study.

### **Theme 2: Limited Accessibility of the Mentor**

Several participants expressed difficulties accessing their mentor, primarily due to logistical or scheduling issues. For example, Audrey had exposure to mentoring. However, she stated that she wished they had more time to work together because everyone had to be in their classrooms to carry out their duties. Amber stated, “My mentor was in a different school section, making meeting difficult. She stated that they met a couple of times, but nothing was programmed (scheduled). “It was like catching my mentor when I could. If I wanted to discuss something, we would try to set up a meeting. My mentor was not always there for me.” So she had to figure out things on her own.

Ada stated, “I would prep once a week with my mentor. So I think that it was a good match, but it was sometimes hard to get together since we were in two different buildings.” Ada found it challenging to schedule time for mentoring since her mentor was away from her building. She met with her mentor once or twice a week during her preparation periods to brainstorm ideas, but it was tough.

**Table 3***Limited Accessibility of the Mentor*

Participants	Accessibility	Limited accessibility	No accessibility
Abby	X		
Alice			X
Alicia	X		
Doris	X		
Audrey		X	
Amber		X	
Ana			X
Ada		X	
Avery			X
Alison		X	

To summarize, as seen in Table 3, a frequent response by the participants in this study was that while most of the mentors were experienced special education teachers, the schools did not allot scheduled times for mentoring services within their schedules. Three of the 10 participants stated that their mentors were accessible. Four stated limited access to their mentors. Three participants did not state access to mentoring. Of the 10 participants, three indicated that their mentor was an experienced special education teacher who was accessible to assist with the duties of a special education teacher. Four of the participants indicated that their mentors were experienced special education teachers but had limited accessibility to meet regularly, and it was seen as an issue due to lack of time.

### **Theme 3: Mentors Help Improve Teaching**

This theme encompassed the ways that participants experienced help from their mentors, particularly in terms of improvement to their teaching. Six out of the 10 participants shared specific ways their mentors assisted them to become better teachers. Abby found her mentoring experience to be helpful and challenging in a way that improved her teaching. Her mentor met with her daily to help provide structure and map out lesson plans. She shared, “My mentor challenged me, and I love what she did. She told me to look at what I learned in college and look at what was happening to me at that point, then compare the two and see how I can improve to be a better teacher.”

Amber had difficulty presenting lessons in math to her students. She learned different strategies to teach math lessons to her students.

Ada shared that the help she received in differentiating the curriculum to meet the needs of her students helped improve her teaching skills. She also learned different strategies that she incorporated into her lessons.

Doris stated that she was grateful for her mentor. “My mentor helped me with developing my annual IEPs for my students. She also helped me with strategies to help my students improve academically.”

Alicia shared, she received assistance developing student learning objectives and developing lesson plans that helped improve her skills.

Finally, Audrey stated, “mentoring has definitely made me a more effective and patient teacher. My mentor has been very helpful in developing IEPs for my students.

Overall, the participants reported an improvement in their teaching skills. The support they received with IEPs helped them to develop appropriate goals and learning objectives for their students. Their experiences with mentoring helped them meet the needs of their students through the development of learning objectives and strategies to enhance their lessons.

#### **Theme 4: Development of Confidence Through Mentoring Aids in Retention**

In response to the impact of confidence on retention of special education teachers participating in a mentoring program, five participants shared their perceptions of mentoring building their confidence to remain in teaching.

Alicia contributed, “I feel confident that I am doing what is expected in the program and that my practices and methods were meeting the standards and we are meeting the requirements. When an administrator walks into my classroom, nobody is going to say what the heck was that all about or what just happened.”

Doris commented, “Oh yes, my mentor built my confidence and made me feel like I was doing the right thing for my students. Now I am able to confidently collaborate with other teachers, staff, administration, and parents.”

Audrey shared, “The mentorship program has made me feel more confident because it allowed me to develop as a special education teacher to determine appropriate skills to help students with disabilities to reach their potential and achieve.”

Ada stated, “I definitely feel that having the support of my mentor, and other teachers helped me.”

Amber shared that she gained confidence in understanding that she had to be herself and not compare herself to other teachers. She was also confident that she was meeting the needs of her students.

### **Theme 5: Motivation to Remain in Teaching not Related only to Mentoring**

In response to the impact of motivation on the retention of special education teachers participating in a mentoring program, five participants shared their perceptions of being motivated to remain in teaching.

Abby shared, “ collaborating with other special education teachers and just sitting and talking about our experience and what we achieved and working together to make sure the students with IEPs are receiving something from the school and not just sitting there.”

Alice shared, “ I guess it is because I love the little ones. I love the kids.” Doris stated, “ I feel like teaching students with disabilities is my calling. I was born to teach this population. I love the children, and I love my job. I could not picture myself doing anything else.”

Amber’s response to motivation by mentoring was as follows: “I do not think so, I mean I love what I do. So, I do not think that having a mentor helped me stay in teaching. I think my passion for the kids has helped me stay in teaching, especially during the pandemic.”

Ana shared, “participating in a mentoring program, motivated me to stay in teaching.” She also felt that the support she received encouraged her to remain teaching the special education population.

Alicia contributed that having a mentor motivated her to remain in the teaching profession because she knew that she was not alone. She had support to assist in meeting the needs of her students.

### **Theme 6: Development of Relatedness Through Mentoring**

In response to the impact of relatedness on retention of special education teachers participating in a mentoring program, five participants shared their perceptions of mentoring on relatedness to remain in teaching.

Abby shared, “ That during collaboration meetings with other teachers, they listened to her ideas.”

Alice stated, “ Mentoring allowed me to get to know other people in the school.”

Alicia contributed, “ Mentoring helped me feel like a part of the staff after I was officially assigned a mentor.”

Doris stated, “ My mentor introduced me to the staff on the first day.” Ada shared, “ My mentor helped me collaborate with the staff.”

Ada shared that her mentor introduced her to the staff and encouraged collaboration among her peers.

### **Theme 7: Development of Competence Through Mentoring Aids in Retention**

In response to the impact of competence on retention of special education teachers participating in a mentoring program, five participants shared their perceptions of mentoring building their competence to remain in teaching.

Abby contributed, “ My mentor taught me how to map out the lessons, take the

IEPs using the standards data and unit.”

Alicia shared, “ I feel competent that I am doing what is expected in the program, that my practices and my methods are meeting the standards and we're meeting the requirements.

Amber commented that mentoring helped her feel competent. “My mentor helped me in the aspect of all the background stuff like the legal things and information about the general education setting. Also, providing appropriate accommodations for students for testing and for the curriculum.”

Doris shared, “Oh, my mentor showed me that I am a competent teacher. I am able to show administrators, teachers, and parents how I use the IEP goals to appropriately deliver instruction to my students.”

Audrey stated, “ Definitely, the mentorship program has made me feel more competent. It allowed me to test myself using the strategies and tools that I have acquired in the classroom to see how effective I am. It worked! It makes me feel more confident as an educator. I am advancing, and of course, I would love to stay throughout the duration of my career in special education.”

### **Summary**

In this chapter, I presented lived experiences, as reported by special education teachers, concerning their exposure to mentoring programs for novice teachers. I discussed my data collection from individual semi-structured interviews with 10 special education teachers and the data analysis used to answer the research questions.

Descriptions of each participant, the research setting, and emergent themes helped develop an understanding of the experiences of special education teachers participating in mentoring programs. The two participants who were not assigned mentors presented data irrelevant to the research questions. However, they responded to questions that referred to their perception of the importance of mentoring and its impact on special education teacher retention. Final themes that emerged from the data included the participants' exposure to formal or informal mentoring, the limited accessibility of the mentors, how mentors helped improve teaching, the development of confidence through mentoring aids in retention, the development of competence through mentoring aids in retention, the development of relatedness through mentoring, and motivation to remain in teaching not only related to mentoring,

Chapter 5 includes the interpretations of this study's findings. Also included are the limitations of the study and recommendations for future research. Lastly, I will conclude the chapter with implications for social change.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

This qualitative phenomenological study aimed to explore and analyze the perceptions and experiences of special education teachers engaged in mentoring programs for novice teachers, specifically in the northeastern region of the United States. As stated in the literature review, novice special education teacher retention is an ongoing problem in the United States. Special education teachers leave the profession at higher rates than their general education peers (Bettini et al., 2019; Zhang & Zeller, 2016). Researchers have cited a lack of support as a reason for the low retention rates of novice special education teachers (Hagaman & Casey, 2018; Mathews et al., 2017). Using the phenomenological approach, I determined that appropriate mentoring exposure can support teacher retention. It appears that exposure to mentoring and accessibility to mentors impacted participants' perceptions of mentoring for teacher retention.

### **Interpretation of the Findings**

Seven themes emerged from the interviews with study participants to answer the research questions. The participants shared their perceptions relevant to exposure to mentoring, access to mentors, the impact of mentoring on teachers' improved teaching, confidence, competence, motivation, and relatedness themes emerged from the interviews with study participants to answer the research questions relevant to exposure to mentoring, access to mentors, the impact of mentoring on teachers' improved teaching, confidence, competence, motivation, and relatedness.

## **Research Question 1**

Research Question 1: What are novice special education teachers' lived experiences of participating in a mentoring program? This research question dealt with how novice special education teachers perceive exposure to mentoring and access to their mentors. The participants shared responses to their experiences with exposure to mentoring. In addition, the participants discussed how accessible their mentors were during mentoring. Based on the findings from this research study, the participants expressed varied experiences with exposure to mentoring and accessibility to their mentors daily. Accessibility of the mentors lacked consistency, and participants expressed that school administration did not provide specified programming to promote scheduled access to mentors regularly. Weisling and Gardiner (2018) reported parameters for implementing mentoring programs using in-side mentoring strategies. The strategies included time for consistent exposure and accessibility of trained mentors that entail clear expectations, co-teaching, modeling strategies, and the mentor's impromptu assistance when necessary (Weisling & Gardiner, 2018). It would appear that for a mentoring program to be implemented with fidelity, the school administration would need to ensure that the mentors are provided with training and given scheduled time to promote optimum exposure and accessibility to their mentees.

### ***Exposure and Accessibility***

The exposure and accessibility theme also resulted from participants' responses to interview questions corresponding to Research Question 1. This study defined exposure as the overall contact mentees had with their mentors. Accessibility is concerned with the

frequency of encounters between mentees and mentors. Mentoring can positively impact the retention of novice special education teachers as they develop the skills necessary to provide services to students with disabilities. All participants related exposure to mentoring during their first 5 years of teaching. However, there were inconsistencies in the overall responses from participants concerning exposure and accessibility.

Participants expressed challenges with access to their mentors due to logistics and scheduling issues. Mentoring programs should be implemented with a vision, training for mentors, specified time for mentoring activities, and ongoing administrative support (Hagaman & Casey, 2018; Weisling & Gardiner, 2018). Many participants indicated that a lack of specified time with mentors was a challenge and that is consistent with some of the literature.

Overall, I gleaned from the participants that exposure and accessibility to mentors were varied and inconsistent. Inconsistencies in providing mentoring services to novice teachers were discussed in previous literature (Hagaman & Casey, 2018; Mathews et al., 2017). These mentoring programs needed to have fidelity. The lack of dedicated scheduled times for mentor–mentee activities made it difficult for some participants to receive support because their mentor was teaching in another school section. Another difficulty reported by the participants was that some mentors lacked knowledge of special education and could not support them in providing services to students with disabilities.

## **Research Question 2**

Research Question 2: What is the role of mentoring towards retention according to the lived experiences of novice special education teachers who participated in a

mentoring program? This research question focused on the participants' perceptions of mentoring influencing novice special education teacher retention. Participants shared their experiences on how participating in mentoring impacted their intentions to remain in the teaching profession. Based on the findings from this study, the participants provided varied information on their exposure to mentoring as having an impact on their intention to remain to teach students with disabilities. For example, some participants shared that their mentors were supportive and encouraging, but their intentions to remain in the teaching profession were internally motivated. Also, participants shared that their mentoring experiences were varied and inconsistent, which also impacted how mentoring externally impacted their intention to remain in the teaching profession. Their experiences were consistent with the findings of Hagaman and Casey (2018) and Weisling and Gardiner (2018), who revealed that mentoring was a positive aspect of an induction program that could support novice teachers and impact their tendency to remain in teaching if implemented with fidelity.

Participants reported feeling that mentoring was important for novice special education teachers to develop proficiency in the profession when implemented with knowledgeable mentors who understood special education. Also, they shared a need for programming that allowed for dedicated mentoring sessions. Finally, their participation in mentoring did not impact their desire to remain in the teaching profession. Overall, the participants expressed that teaching students with disabilities was their calling.

### **Research Question 3**

Research Question 3: What is the role of mentoring towards retention using *motivation*, as a self-determination theory factor, according to the lived experiences of novice special education teachers? This research question focused on how participants perceived participation in a mentoring program as a motivator toward teacher retention. As defined by self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2017), motivation focuses on internal aspects such as a need to gain knowledge or independence that influences growth.

Most participants did not cite mentoring as a motivator for their retention in the teaching profession. According to the perception of six participants, mentoring did not externally impact their motivation to remain in the teaching profession. The participants' responses were more focused on an internal locus of control. Participants expressed their love of teaching students with disabilities as their motivator to remain in teaching. Hence, in this study, mentoring was not identified as a motivator for retention. However, the internal locus of control was consistent with the self-determination theory that focused on internal sources of motivation that promote autonomy.

### **Research Question 4**

Research Question 4: What is the role of mentoring towards retention using *relatedness*, as a self-determination theory factor, according to the lived experiences of novice special education teachers? In this study, relatedness pertained to participants feeling connected with their peers within satisfying and supportive relationships (Power & Goodnough, 2019; Ryan & Deci, 2017). Using self-determination theory, Ryan and

Deci (2017) referred to the participants' perceptions of a sense of collegiality among their peers. Most participants perceived mentoring as building their relatedness. They perceived themselves as being a part of the school community. They also stated that they felt respected by their peers. Participants added that their peers listened and accepted their input during teacher team meetings while planning lessons. As a result, mentoring was perceived as a positive entity in building connectivity and value within their teaching community that could influence the retention of novice special education teachers. Cultivating environments fostered the collaboration of special education and general education teachers. It provided opportunities for sharing ideas and strategies that impacted the achievement of both general and special education students. The participants revealed they felt respected and part of the staff because their mentors encouraged cross-grade curriculum collaborations with teachers in Grades one to eight, including ESL. Their mentors also provided opportunities for them to brainstorm ideas and strategies with other teachers to meet the needs of their students. In addition, through working with a mentor, novice special education teachers felt comfortable reaching out to other teachers for support

### **Research Question 5**

Research Question 5: What is the role of mentoring towards retention using competence, as a self-determination theory factor, according to the lived experiences of novice special education teachers? *Competence* referred to participants' perceptions of feeling they were influential within their environment and were allowed to demonstrate their capabilities.

Participants perceived mentoring as building their competence and intended to remain in teaching. They also indicated that working with their mentors influenced their ability to perform activities related to the duties of a special education teacher. Abby shared that her mentor showed her how to develop lessons incorporating student IEPs and standards data. She also stated that she felt competent teaching students with disabilities in middle school, high school, or college. Doris stated that her mentor showed her how to use student IEP goals to appropriately deliver instruction to her students and that her students were progressing academically. She also added that she felt competent showing the administration, her peers, and parents how she used IEP goals to teach the students. Audrey shared that participation in the mentoring program made her feel competent and encouraged her to test her capabilities using different classroom strategies to determine her effectiveness. Consistent with the literature, mentoring can be construed as a conduit for building teacher competencies that can influence the retention of novice special education teachers when coupled with positive school culture (Bower-Phipps et al., 2016; Hagaman & Casey, 2018; Weisling & Gardiner, 2018). In conclusion, mentors must be trained to mentor novice special education teachers.

### **Limitations**

The study was limited to a participant sample of 10 novice special education teachers with one to five years of experience teaching students with disabilities. The small sample size of 10 participants was noted as a limitation, and the study results may not be transferable to a larger population. All participants stated experience with mentoring and were willing to participate in in-depth interviews and follow-up meetings.

Additionally, using a phenomenological approach, the research focused on achieving a deeper understanding of the issues instead of finding causal relationships (Moustakas, 1994). The essential characteristics of the participants consisted of their experiences with mentoring and willingness to participate in the interview processes. The shared characteristics of the participants do not make the study results representative of a larger population, which might present as a potential weakness.

### **Recommendations**

This study could lead to further research focusing on the impact of mentoring on novice special education teacher retention. The current literature on mentoring for novice special education teachers is limited (Cornelius et al., 2020; Mason-Williams, 2015; Sowell, 2017). In addition, it might be beneficial to conduct a future study to identify the impact of mentoring on novice special education teacher retention. A large-scale study that would include more mentoring programs for novice special education teachers could assist in the generalizability of the findings.

### **Implications**

Dissemination of the study findings to school administrators may inform them how to improve mentoring programs specifically targeting novice special education teachers. Teacher retention of special education teachers is an ongoing concern in the United States (Chapman et al., 2021; Hagaman & Casey, 2018; Haines et al., 2017; Warsame & Valles, 2018). According to research conducted by Chapman et al. (2021), it was stated that “a laser focus” is needed to promote novice special education teacher retention. This research supports the findings of my study. Mentoring specifically

implemented for novice special education teachers may serve to influence induction programs and improve retention.

The development of mentoring programs specifically designed to meet the needs of novice special education teachers involves schools and administrators ensuring that mentors are experienced special education teachers who have had the training to mentor novice special education teachers (Bower-Phillips et al., 2016; Weisling & Gardiner, 2018). The mentors would be trained in all aspects of the duties of special education teachers, such as understanding federal mandates, writing IEPs, modifying curriculum for students with disabilities, class discipline, and other activities. Additionally, school personnel and administrators must allocate scheduled time for the mentors' and mentees' daily schedules for them to meet. Overall, the favorable social implication is that novice special education teachers will be provided with support through participation in mentoring programs specifically designed to meet their needs.

### **Conclusion**

In this study, I interviewed 10 novice special education teachers who shared their perceptions of their experiences participating in a mentoring program. The study's results indicated that most participants found mentoring necessary in providing support to novice special education teachers. The interview data addressed the needs of mentees participating in mentoring programs. However, the participants revealed that the challenge of scheduling mentoring sessions impacted their access to their mentors. It is also necessary for administrators to implement mentoring programs for novice special education teachers with fidelity, which involves allocating scheduled time for mentors to

meet with their mentees daily. Mentors should be carefully selected and trained to provide appropriate support to novice special education teachers (Bower-Phillips et al., 2016; Weisling & Gardiner, 2018). Positive social change for mentoring of novice special education teachers is that the findings of this study may influence district and school administration regarding the implementation of mentoring programs specifically designed to support novice special education teachers.

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## Appendix A: Demographics Questionnaire

1. What is your current job title.  
\_\_\_\_\_
  2. How many years have you been a Special Education teacher? \_\_\_\_\_
  3. Have you participated in a mentoring program for novice teachers? \_\_\_\_\_
- Highest degree attained:
- a. Bachelor's
  - b. Master's
  - c. Doctorate
4. Gender
    - a. Male \_\_\_\_\_
    - b. Female \_\_\_\_\_
  5. Race or ethnicity
    - a. American Indian/Alaskan Native
    - b. Asian/Pacific Islander
    - c. Black/African American
    - d. Hispanic/Latino
    - e. White/Caucasian
  6. What is your age? \_\_\_\_\_
  7. Did you have any formal teaching experience prior to becoming a special education teacher? \_\_\_\_\_ If yes, how many years? \_\_\_\_\_
  8. What are your experiences as a special education teacher? (self-contained, ICT, SETSS) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Date:	Interviewee (Pseudonym):
Interviewer:	

“Thank you for agreeing to answer these questions I’ve developed for my dissertation research project where the purpose is to examine “experiences of novice special education teachers who were in mentoring program. As you probably know, I would like to ask a few specific questions about you as a special education teacher and a few more open questions. The interview will be approximately 45 minutes. I will be recording this interview and will later transcribe it, but your identity will not be shared when we compile responses from other special education teachers. Your participation and whatever you might disclose is voluntary and you can stop at any time”.  
It is nice to meet you. How is the year going?

“OK. Here are a few specific questions that I will obtain before starting the recording to protect your identity. Tell me about your background.”

1. Do you agree to be interviewed (45 min+ 15 min) for this research?

a. Yes \_\_\_

b. No \_\_\_

2. What is the best way to communicate with you?

a. E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

b. Text \_\_\_

c. Phone \_\_\_

3. Do you presently work in a public school?

a. Yes\_\_\_

b. No\_\_\_

4. Would you be interested to hear about the findings of this research?

a. Yes \_\_\_

b. No \_\_\_

“Again, thank you for your participation. I would first like to define a few terms: novice special education teacher, mentor, and mentoring.

The following terms are defined for the interview:

*Mentee*: a less experienced (teacher) professional who is mentored by an experienced professional (Gimbel & Kefor, 2018; Hudson, 2016).

*Mentor*: a more experienced (teacher) professional (Gimbel & Kefor, 2018; Hudson, 2016).

*Mentoring*: the relationship between the mentor (a more experienced teacher professional) and the mentee as one who is learning about the profession ( Gimbel & Kefor, 2018; Hudson, 2016).

*Novice*: An individual who has less experience in a particular field—here, fewer than 5 years of teaching ( Bettini et al., 2017; Hagaman & Casey, 2017).

I would like to start to audio record and ask you a few questions about your mentor program experiences, is that okay? (wait for their consent to start audio recording).  
*Start audio recording.*

*Description of Novice Special Education Teacher Mentoring Experiences*

1. Tell me about your experiences as a new special education teacher receiving mentoring? (RQ1)
2. Tell me about your mentor? (RQ1)
3. Reflect on the activities that you participated in with your mentor? (RQ1)
4. How do you feel about the mentoring program that you participated in and the services that you received? (RQ1)
5. Please tell me about a collaborative meeting between your mentor and yourself. (RQ1)

6. Tell me some of the challenges you faced during your first year of teaching?  
(RQ1)
7. Tell me about any challenges you faced during your first year of teaching and how mentoring may have helped you overcome them. (RQ1 and 2)
8. What, if any obstacles do you feel might get in the way of you doing your job as a special education teacher? (RQ1)

*Knowledge Gained from Mentoring Experiences*

9. Explain how your mentor has helped you grow in this profession as a teacher, specifically in terms of your own knowledge, this past year. (RQ2)
10. Tell me about any knowledge you gained through the mentoring program to help you provide services to students with disabilities. (RQ2)
11. Tell me if anything stands out in your mind from your mentoring program experiences as something that helped you in teaching students with disabilities?  
(RQ1 and 2)

*Teaching Skills Gained from Mentoring Experiences*

12. Tell me about some of the new teaching skills that you gained through participation in the mentoring program? (RQ1)
13. Tell me about any of your teaching skills that were improved upon through participation in the mentoring program? (RQ1)
14. Tell me what types of skills do you use to teach students with disabilities because of the mentoring services you received? (RQ3)

15. How did participation in the mentoring program motivate you to continue to remain teaching during that year (those years)? (RQ3)
16. What happened when on your first day reporting to school before the students? Were you introduced to the staff? How did you feel? (RQ4)
17. How did participation in the mentoring program help you to feel like a part of the staff ? (RQ4)
18. How did participation in the mentoring program help you gain confidence in teaching? (RQ5)
19. How did participating in the mentoring program help you to become more competent in your teaching abilities? (RQ5) Do you feel that you will remain in the teaching profession teaching students with disabilities? Why? And for how long?
20. How do you think participation in mentoring programs can help encourage novice (new) special education teachers to remain in the teaching profession? (RQ2,3,4,5)

**Figure B1***Interview Protocol Matrix*

	Background Information	RQ1	RQ2	RQ3	RQ4	RQ5
Interview Q1		X				
Interview Q2		X				
Interview Q3		X				
Interview Q4		X				
Interview Q5	X	X				
Interview Q6		X				
Interview Q7	X	X	X			
Interview Q8		X	X			
Interview Q9			X			
Interview Q10			X			
Interview Q11		X	X			
Interview Q12		X				
Interview Q13		X				
Interview Q14				X		
Interview Q15	X			X		
Interview Q16					X	
Interview Q17					X	
Interview Q18						X
Interview Q19						X
Interview Q20			X	X	X	X

You have been so helpful. I really appreciate the time you have taken to talk with me.

Thank you for your participation. I appreciate the time you took for an interview. Your responses from this interview or any future follow-up meeting will be kept confidential.

A copy of the interview transcript will be e-mailed to you to confirm accuracy and I will also contact you via audio recorded using a conferencing portal to clarify or validate the transcript.